

OSWALD CRAY

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OSWALD CRAY BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," "TREVLYN HOLD," ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

Dr. Davenal.

IT was market-day at Hallingham. A moderate-sized and once beautiful town, cut up now by the ugly railroad which had chosen to take its way right through it, and to build a large station on the very spot where the Abbey Gardens used to flourish. Famous gardens once; and not so long ago the evening recreation of the townspeople, who would promenade there at sunset, whatever the time of year. Since the gardens had been seized upon for the railway purposes, a bitter feud of opinion had reigned in the place: the staid old inhabitants mourning and resenting their town's desecration; the younger welcoming the new rail, its station, and its bustle, with all their might and main, as a grateful inbreak on their monotonous life. The trains from London (distant some sixty or seventy miles) would go shrieking and whistling through the town at any hour of the day or night: and, so far, peace for Hallingham was over.

Possibly it was because the town was famous for little else, that these Abbey Gardens were so regretted. Hallingham Abbey had been renowned in the ages gone by; very little of its greatness was left to it now. The crumbling hand of Time had partially destroyed the fine old building, an insignificant portion of it alone remaining: just sufficient to

impart a notion of its style of architecture and the century of its erection: and this small portion had been patched and propped, and altogether altered and modernised, by way of keeping it together. It was little more than an ordinary dwelling-house now; and at the present moment was unoccupied, ready to be let to any suitable tenant who would take it. But, poor as it was in comparison with some of the modern dwellings in its vicinity, it was still in a degree bowed down to by Hallingham. There was something high-sounding in the address, "The Abbey, Hallingham," and none but a gentleman born and bred must venture to treat for it.

It stood alone: the extensive gardens in front of it; the space once occupied by the chapel behind it. All traces of the chapel building were gone now, but its mossy gravestones were imbedded in the ground still, and the spot remained as sacred as a graveyard. The Latin inscriptions on some of these stones could be yet made out: and that on one attracted as much imaginative speculation as the famed gravestone in the cloisters of Worcester Cathedral. A few Latin words only were on it, signifying "buried in misery:" no name, no date. Thoughtful natures would glance at that stone as they passed it, with an inward breath of hope — perhaps of prayer — that the misery experienced by its unhappy tenant in this world, had been exchanged for a life of immortality. This graveyard was not a thoroughfare, and few cared to walk there who were absorbed in the bustle and pleasures of life; but the aged, the invalid, the mourner might be seen there on fine days, seated on its one solitary bench, and buried in solemn reflections. A short space of time, more or less, as it might happen, and they would be lying under gravestones in their turn: a short space of time, my friends, and you and I shall be equally lying there.

The broad space of the public road running along the

Abbey's front divided it from the gardens, the gardens being the public property of the town. On the opposite side of these gardens, furthest from the Abbey, were the buildings of the new station and the lines upon lines of rails.

It is well to say lines upon lines of rails! Hallingham said it — said it with a groan. Not content with a simple line, or a double line of rails, sufficient for ordinary traffic, the railway authorities had made it into a "junction," "Hallingham Junction!" — and more lines branched off from it than you would care to count. This was at the east end of the town; beyond it was the open country. Some of the lines made a sort of semicircle, cut off a corner of the town, and branched off into space. It's true it was a very shabby little corner of the town that had thus been cut off, but Hallingham did not the less resent the invasion.

Walking down to Hallingham along the broad road leading from the Abbey, its busiest part was soon gained. Let us look at it to-day: Tuesday. It is market-day at Hallingham, and the hot July sun streams full on the people's heads, for there's no room for the raised umbrellas, and they afford little continuous shade. It is the large, wide, open space in front of the town-hall, where we have halted, and here from time immemorial the market people have sat to chaffer and change, barter and sell. Country women expose their poultry and eggs, their butter and cream cheese, and their other wares, all on this spot. No matter what the weather, in the dog-days of summer, in the sharp snow, the pitiless storm of winter, here they are every Tuesday under their sea of umbrellas, which must be put down to allow space to the jostling crowd when the market gets full. The town had been talking the last ten years of erecting a covered market-house; but it was not begun yet.

Still on, down the principal street, leaving this market-

place to the left, and what was called the West-end of the town was gained. Proud Hallingham had named it West-end in imitation of London. It was nothing but a street; its name, New Street, proclaiming that it was of more recent date than some of the other parts. It was really a fine street, wide and open, with broad white pavements, and its houses were mostly private ones, their uniformity of line being broken by a detached house here and there. It was a long street, and five or six other by-streets and turnings branched off from it at right angles.

Lying back from the street at the corner of one of these turnings was a handsome white house, detached, with a fine pillared-portico entrance in its centre, and a plate on the door. It was fully as conspicuous to the street as were the other houses which abutted on the pavement. A level lawn was before it, divided from the street by low light iron railings, its small light gate in the midst, opposite the entrance door. Narrow flower-beds, filled with gay and charming flowers, skirted the lawn before the rails; on the sides, but not in front, flourished evergreens close to the railings behind the flower-beds, making a sort of screen. An enclosed garden lay at the back of the house, and beyond the garden were the stables. On the brass plate — you could read it from the street — was inscribed, "Dr. Davenal."

He was the chief *surgeon* of Hallingham. Why he had taken his degree — a recent accession of dignity — people were puzzled to tell. Had he cared for high-sounding titles they could have understood it; but he did not care for them: had he been a slave to example, that might have accounted for it, for this degree-taking, as you must be aware, has come into fashion of late years: had he wished to court notoriety, he might have thought that a means to bring it to him. But Hallingham knew Dr. Davenal better. He was a simple-

mind man; he liked to be out of the fashion instead of in it; and whether he wrote doctor or surgeon after his name, he could not be more deservedly renowned in his locality than he already was. He was a skilful surgeon, a careful and successful operator, and his advice in purely medical cases was sought in preference to that of any physician in Hallingham. A rumour arose, untraceable to any certain source, that his son Edward, a dashing young captain of infantry, had urged the step upon him, with a view to enhance his own standing with his brother officers. The son of Mr. Davenal, a country surgeon, might be thought slightly of: the son of Dr. Davenal need not be. Be that as it might, the rumour gained some credence, but it died away again. One patient only ventured to question Dr. Davenal as to its truth, and the doctor laughed heartily in his patient's face, and said he expected handsome Ned could hold his own without reference to whether his father might be a royal physician or a parish apothecary.

Before we go on, I may tell you that you will like Dr. Davenal. He was a good man. He had his faults, as we all have; but he was a good man.

On this same hot July afternoon, there came careering down the street, in its usual quick fashion, a handsome open carriage drawn by a pair of beautiful bays. Dr. Davenal did not see why, because he was a doctor, his carriage should be a sober one, his horses tame and rusty. Truth to say, he was given to spend rather than to save. I have told you he had faults, and perhaps you will call that one. He sat in his accustomed seat, low in the carriage, his servant Roger mounted far above him. He rarely drove, himself; never when paying professional visits: a surgeon needs to keep his hands steady. Roger was a favourite servant; fourteen years he had been in his present service, and was getting fat

upon it. Dr. Davenal sometimes told him jokingly that he should have to pension him off, for his weight was getting too much for the bays. The same could not be said of Dr. Davenal; he was a spare man of middle height, with a broad white forehead, dark eyes, and a careworn expression.

The carriage was bowling quickly past the market-place — Dr. Davenal's time was too precious to allow of his being driven slowly — when a woman suddenly descried it. Quitting her sitting-place in the market, she set off to run towards it, flinging up her hands in agitation, and overturning her small board of wares with the haste she made. Poor wares! — gooseberries and white and red currants displayed on cabbage leaves to attract the eager eyes and watering lips of juvenile passers-by; and common garden flowers tied up in nosegays — a halfpenny a nosegay, a halfpenny a leaf. Roger saw the movement.

“Here's Dame Hundley flying on to us, sir.”

Dr. Davenal, who was very much in the habit of falling into thought, seeing and hearing nothing as he went along, raised his head, and turning it in the direction of the market, met her anxious countenance.

“Pull up, Roger,” he said to his servant.

The countenance was a tearful one by the time it had reached the doctor's side; and then the woman seemed to become aware that she had done an unwarrantable thing in thus summarily arresting Dr. Davenal — not that there was anything in his face or manner to remind her of it.

“Oh, sir, I beg ten thousand pardons for making thus bold! Seeing your carriage, I started off in the moment's impulse. I've been a-fearing all the morning as I sat there, that maybe you might be out when I called, after market was over. He is no better, sir; he is worser and weaker.”

"Ah!" remarked the doctor. "Couldn't he come in to-day?"

"I don't believe there'll ever be any more coming in again for him," was the woman's answer, as she strove to suppress her tears. "'Mother,' says he to me this morning, when I tried to get him up, 'it's o' no use trying. I—I—'" she fairly broke down.

"Does the parish doctor see him regularly?"

"He comes, sir, about every third day. He caught his eye on that bottle of physic that you wrote for and told me to get made up, and he laid hold of it and asked where I got that, and I told him I had made bold to take my poor boy in to Dr. Davenal. So then he was put up about it, and said if we was going to be grand patients of Dr. Davenal's we didn't want him. And I thought perhaps he mightn't come again. But he did: he came in last night at dusk."

"Has your son taken the physic?"

"Yes, sir. I gave him the last dose afore I come away this morning. But he's worse; he's a deal worse, sir: maybe it's these hot days that's trying him."

Dr. Davenal could have told her that he never would be anything but worse in this world; a little better, a little worse, according to the phases of the disease, and then would come the ending.

"I shall, I expect, be driving out of Hallingham your way this evening, Mrs. Hundley, and I'll call and see him. Should anything prevent it this evening, you may look for me to-morrow. I'll be sure to come."

The same good, considerate man that he had ever been, sparing no trouble, no kindness, when life or health was at stake. "I'll be sure to come!" and the woman knew that he would be sure to come. How few medical men in his position would have condescended to say to this poor woman, "I'll be

sure to come!" to say it in the kind tone, with the promise in his eyes as they looked straight into hers, as well as on his lips! He had fellow practitioners in that town, their time not half taken up as his was, who would have loftily waved off poor Dame Hundley, a profitless patient, in every sense, and sent her sorrow to the winds.

Roger drove quickly on down the street between the rows of gay shops, and Dr. Davenal sat thinking of that poor woman's sorrow. She was a widow, and this was her only son. Did the anticipated loss of that son strike on the chords of his own heart, and send them vibrating? *He* had lost a son, and under unhappy auspices. Save that woman's son, he knew he could not: his death fiat had gone forth in the fell disease which had attacked him: but he might possibly, by the exertion of his skill, prolong the life by a trifle, and certainly lighten its sufferings. Mrs. Hundley had toiled for this son, and brought him up well, in her poor way, and had looked brightly forward to his helping her on in her old age: as he would have done, for he was steady, loving, and dutiful. But it was not to be: God was taking him: and the mother in her alarm and grief scarcely saw why this should be. Not at the time that affliction falls, in its first brunt, can we see or believe in the love and wisdom that are always hidden within it.

Roger pulled up at the doctor's house, set his master down, and turned his horses round into the side lane — for it could not be called a street — to drive them to the stables. Dr. Davenal went through the gate, and wound round the grass-plat to the house. As he was about to open the door with his latch-key, it was drawn open for him by his attentive in-door man-servant.

You never saw so respectable a servant in all your life: a very model of a servant in looks, voice, and manner. About forty years of age, his tall, slim, active figure gave him the

appearance of being a younger man. His hair, brushed smooth and flat, was of a shiny black, and his white necktie and orthodox black clothes were without a spot. But — in spite of his excessive respectability as a man and a servant — there was something in the sharp features of his white face, in the furtive black eyes, that would lose their look of slyness when flung boldly into yours, which had never been cordially liked by Dr. Davenal.

“You saw me, Neal?”

“I was in your room, sir, speaking to Mr. Cray,” was the man’s answer; and in his low, respectful tones, his superior accent, there was really a sound of refinement pleasant to the ear. That refinement of voice and manner that may be caught from associating with the educated; not the refinement springing from the mind where it is innate.

“Has anybody been here?”

“Lady Oswald, sir. She apologised for coming when it was not your day for receiving town-patients, but she said she particularly wished to see you. I think she scarcely believed me, sir, when I said you were out.”

Dr. Davenal took his gold repeater from his pocket, where it lay loose, unattached to any chain, and glanced at it. A valuable watch; the grateful present of a rich man years ago, who believed that he owed his life, humanly speaking, to Richard Davenal’s care and skill.

“Scarcely believed you! Why, she knows I am never home much before three o’clock. It wants two minutes now. Mr. Cray, if he is here, might have seen her.”

“Mr. Cray has but just come, sir. I was showing him in when your carriage drove to the door. Lady Oswald said she would call again later, sir.”

Two minutes more, when three o’clock should strike, and Dr. Davenal’s door would be beset by patients. By country

patients to-day; on Tuesdays he would be very busy with them, and the towns-people did not intrude unnecessarily upon him on that day; all the rest of the week-days were for them. They would come, these patients, and lay down their fee of a guinea to the surgeon, as they laid it down for a physician. Dr. Davenal would see them twice for that; sometimes more — several times more; he was not a covetous man, and he distinguished between those who could well afford to pay him, and those who could not. When these last would timidly put down the sovereign and shilling, rarely in paper, he would push it back to them. “No, you paid me last time or so; you don’t owe me anything yet.”

Of far and wide reputation, he had scarcely a minute in the day that he could call his own, or that was not in some way or other devoted to his profession. Chief visiting surgeon to the Hallingham Infirmary, always taking the operations there in difficult cases, part of every day had to be spent at it. Early in the morning he saw patients at home, twice a week gratuitously; at a quarter to ten he went out, and between that time and three o’clock paid his round of calls and visited the Infirmary. At three he was at home to receive patients again; at six he dined; and it very rarely happened that he had not second visits to pay afterwards. Of course this usual routine of duty was often varied: visits at a distance had to be paid, necessitating post-horses to his close carriage, if no rail conducted to the place; patients hovering between life and death must be seen oftener than once or twice in the day, perhaps in the night; and sometimes a terrible case of accident would be brought into the Infirmary, demanding the utmost skill that the most perfect operator could give. In those cases of accident it was Dr. Davenal who was sent for by the house-surgeon; none other of the visiting surgeons were so sure as he: and Dr. Davenal, though he had a whole dining-room

full of patients waiting their turn to go in to him, guinea in hand, abandoned them all, and strode away to the Infirmary with his fleetest step.

The dining-room was on the left of the entrance-hall: it was of large proportions. Opposite to it, on the right, was a much smaller apartment, called by way of distinction "Dr. Davenal's room." It was in this last the doctor saw his patients, who would go into it from the dining-room, one by one, each in his turn. The two rooms looked to the front, on either side the door, and the window in each was very large. They were not bay windows, but were divided into three compartments, all of which might be opened separately. Dwarf Venetian blinds were carried up to the first pane in both windows, for the house was not sufficiently removed from the street to prevent curious passers-by from gazing in. Behind the doctor's room was another room, opening from it, the windows of which looked on the evergreens skirting the very narrow path that ran between the side of the house and the railings bordering the lane: a path so narrow that nobody was supposed ever to go down it. This second room was Dr. Davenal's bedchamber, used by him as such ever since the death of his wife. At the back of this chamber was another apartment, partially partitioned into two, one portion being used as a butler's pantry, the other as Neal's sleeping-closet, which looked to the garden at the rear of the house.

Neal had an uncommon partiality for that pantry, and would be in it all hours of the day or night, though it was never meant that he should sit in it. It was to all intents and purposes a pantry only, and a very scantily lighted one. It had a high window of four square panes, looking dead on the evergreens, very dense just there, and on nothing else. There was a door by its side, opening on the evergreens also; and one with a slim figure — as slim as Neal's, for instance — could

go out at that door if so disposed, and entwine himself along the narrow path, braving the shrubs, past the windows of Dr. Davenal's bedchamber, and emerge in front of the house. It was not at all, however, in Neal's stipulated duties to do so. Quite the contrary. When Neal entered Dr. Davenal's service, he was expressly ordered to keep that pantry door always fastened. It was impressed upon him by Miss Davenal that there was no necessity ever to unlock it: his plate was there, she observed, and light-fingered beggars frequented Hallingham, as they frequent most other places.

On the opposite side, behind the dining-room, was the prettiest apartment in the house. It was called the garden-parlour, and opened to the garden at the back by means of glass doors. The state drawing-room was above, over the hall and dining-room, and the kitchens were down-stairs.

Dr. Davenal's room was scantily furnished. A shabby Kidderminster carpet, a square table, some horsehair chairs, and a writing desk. Nothing else, except some books ranged round the walls, and a plaster bust or two. On the table, which was covered with a green-baize cloth bordered with yellow, lay some writing and blotting paper by the side of a large ink-stand, and the desk was underneath the table on the carpet. It was the doctor's habit to keep the desk there; he could not have told why. If he required to open it, which was very seldom — for he never used it for writing on — he would lift it to the table and put it back when he had done with it. Some of his patients sitting at the table waiting for the doctor to come in, or enlarging on their complaints as he sat before them, had surreptitiously used it as a footstool, and the result was a considerably scratched surface of the polished mahogany; but Dr. Davenal did not move it from its abiding-place.

Tilting himself on a chair, in a fashion that threatened an

overthrow backwards, with his feet on the edge of this very desk, sat a young man, carelessly humming a popular song. You heard Neal tell his master he was there — Mr. Cray. His face was a sufficiently pleasing one, its complexion fair, its eyes a light blue. It was not a remarkable face in any way; might have been a somewhat insipid one, but for these same blue eyes that lighted it up, and a gay smile that was ever ready on it. All that Mr. Cray appeared likely to be remarkable for as yet, was a habit of pushing his hair back — rather light hair, of a shade between brown and flaxen, and he pushed it off his forehead inveterately, at all times and seasons. But what with the blue eyes, the winning smile, and a very taking voice and manner, he was beginning to win his way in Hallingham. Dr. Davenal was glad that it should be so. He had taken this young man, Marcus Cray, by the hand, had made him his partner, and he desired nothing better than that he should win his way.

But to win a way in a town is one thing; to win hearts in it is another; and Dr. Davenal was certainly not prepared to hear, as he was about to do, that Mr. Cray had gained one particular heart, and had come then to ask his, Dr. Davenal's, approbation to his having done it.

Neal threw open the door of this room for his master, bowed him in with the air of a groom of the chambers, and Mr. Cray started from his tilting position to find his feet. As they stood together his height was somewhat under the doctor's, and *his* only reached the middle height.

"Is it you, Mark?" said the doctor, quietly, rather surprised that he should be there at that hour of the day; for Mr. Cray's routine of duties did not lie at the house of Dr. Davenal. "Any bad report for me?"

Mr. Cray had no bad report. He entered upon a different sort of report, speaking rapidly, but not in the least agitatedly.

He wanted the doctor's consent to his marriage with Miss Caroline Davenal. Perhaps it was the knowledge that they must so soon be interrupted by three o'clock and the doctor's country patients, that prompted Mr. Cray to enter upon the subject at that not over-seasonable hour. There would be less time for the doctor's objections, he may have deemed — not that Mr. Cray was one to anticipate objections to any project he set his fancy on, or to pay much attention to them if they came.

Dr. Davenal stood against the wall near the window looking very grave in his surprise and, it may be said, vexation. He had never dreamt of this. Mr. Cray had certainly been intimate with his family; many an evening when the doctor had been out professionally, Mr. Cray had spent with them; but he had never given a thought to anything of this sort arising from it. His connection with Mr. Cray was a professional connection, and perhaps that fact had blinded his eyes and kept his thoughts from glancing to the possibility that anything different might supervene.

"You look grave, Dr. Davenal," said Mr. Cray, breaking the silence, and retaining, in a remarkable degree, his self-possession.

"Yes," replied the doctor, "for Caroline's sake. Mark, I believe I had cherished more ambitious dreams for her."

"Ambitious dreams!" repeated Mr. Cray. "She will at least occupy a position as good as yours, sir."

"As good as mine!" echoed the doctor. "But when, Mark? — when?" he added, after a pause.

"In time."

"Ay — in time. There it is. How long must you wait for it?"

"We shall rub on until then, doctor. As others do."

"Mark, I do not think Caroline is one to rub on, as you call

it, so smoothly as some might, unless fortune is smooth about her. Remember what your income is."

"It is two hundred a year," said Mark, pushing his hair from his brow, and speaking with as much equanimity as though he had said two thousand. "But I thought perhaps you might be induced to increase it — for her sake."

Dr. Davenal pulled open the green Venetian blind and threw the window higher up, as if the air of the room were growing too hot for him. It was the window — or rather the compartment of it — nearest to the lane, and the doctor was fond of keeping it a little raised. Summer and winter would the passers-by see that window raised behind the green staves of the blind.

"Were I to double your income, Mark, and make it four hundred a year — a thing which you have no right to expect me to do at present, or to ask me to do — it would still be an inadequate income for Caroline Davenal," resumed the doctor, closing the blind again, and setting his back against it. "I don't believe — it is my opinion, Mark, and I only give it you as such — that she is one to make the best of a small income, or to be happy on it."

Mr. Cray had caught up one of the doctor's pens, and stood opposite to him picking the feather-end of it off bit by bit. His attitude was a careless one, and his eyes were bent upon the pen, as if to pick those pieces off and litter the carpet were of more consequence than looking at Dr. Davenal. Mr. Cray was inclined to be easy over most things, to take life coolly, and he was characteristically easy over this.

"Four hundred a year is not so small an income," he observed.

"That depends," said Dr. Davenal. "Incomes are large or small in comparison; in accordance with the requirements, the habits, the notions, if you will, of those who have to live

upon them. Caroline has enjoyed the advantages derivable from one amounting to three times four."

"She may come into that fortune yet," said Mr. Cray.

The first gleam of real displeasure shone now in the eyes of the doctor as he threw them searchingly on his partner. "Have you been counting upon that? — Is it the inducement which has called forth this proposal?"

"No," burst forth Mr. Cray, feeling vexed in his turn and speaking impulsively, as he flung the dilapidated pen back in the inkstand and drew nearer the doctor. "I declare that I never thought of the money or the suit; it did not so much as cross my mind; and were Carine never to have a penny piece to the end of her life, it would make no difference. It is her I want; not money."

Dr. Davenal drew in his lips. "Carine!" They must have become tolerably intimate for him familiarly to call her that. "Pretty Carine" was her fond name in the household.

"It was Caroline herself who spoke of the money," resumed Mark Cray. "We were consulting together as to how far my two hundred a year would keep us, and she remembered the Chancery suit. 'Mark,' she said, 'that fortune may come to me, and then we should have no care.' It was not I who thought of it, Dr. Davenal. And I am sure I don't count upon it: Caroline herself would be wise not to do so. Chancery suits generally absorb the oyster and leave the shell for the claimants."

"You have spoken to Caroline, then?" questioned Dr. Davenal.

Mark pushed off his hair again. "Oh dear yes."

"May I ask when?"

"Well — I don't know," answered Mr. Cray, after considering the point. "I have been — I have been" —

"What?" cried Dr. Davenal, surprised at the unusual hesitation. "Speak out, Mark."

"I was going to say I have been making love to her ever so long," continued Mark, with a laugh. "In fact, sir, we have understood each other for some time past; but as to the precise period that I actually spoke out to her by words, I am not sure when it was."

The contrast between the two men was observable in the silence that ensued. Dr. Davenal grave, absorbed, full of thought and care; Mr. Cray self-satisfied, looking as if neither thought nor care had ever come to him, or could come. He lightly watched the passers-by in the street, over the Venetian blind of the middle window, nodding and smiling to any acquaintances that happened to appear. Mr. Cray had made up his mind to marry Miss Caroline Davenal, and it was entirely out of his creed to suppose that any insurmountable objection could supervene.

"Mark," said Dr. Davenal, interrupting the gentleman as he was flourishing his hand to somebody, "you must be aware that circumstances render it imperative upon me to be more than commonly watchful over the interests of Caroline."

"Do you think so? But, Dr. Davenal, I would be sure to make her happy. I would spend my life in it: none would make her as happy as I."

"How do you know that?" asked Dr. Davenal.

A smile hovered on the young surgeon's lips. "Because she cares for me, sir; and for none other in the wide world."

"I had thought — I had thought that another cared for her," returned Dr. Davenal, speaking impulsively. "At least, a doubt of it has sometimes crossed me."

Mark Cray opened his eyes widely in his astonishment. "Who?" he asked.

But Dr. Davenal did not satisfy him: not that he had any

particular motive for observing reticence on the point. "It is of no consequence. I must have been mistaken," was all he said.

"You will not forbid her to me, sir?" pleaded Mr. Cray.

A spasm of pain passed across the face of Dr. Davenal; the words had called up bitter recollections.

"So long as I live I shall never forbid a marriage to any over whom I hold control," he said, in a tone of subdued anguish — and Mark Cray knew where the sting had pointed, and wished in his goodnature he had not put the question. "I will urge all reflection, caution, prudence in my power to urge; but I will not forbid. Least of all have I a right to do so by Caroline."

The younger man's face lighted up. "Then you will give her to me, Dr. Davenal?"

"I give you no promise," was the doctor's answer. "I must have leisure to reflect on this; it has taken me entirely by surprise. And I must speak to Caroline. There's plenty of time. To marry yet would indeed be premature."

"Premature?" echoed Mr. Cray.

"Premature in the extreme. A man who does not know how to wait for good things, Mark, does not deserve them."

A lady, with a slow walk and pale face, turned in at the front gate. It was patient the first. Dr. Davenal made no observation; he scarcely saw her, so deeply had he plunged into thought. Mr. Cray, who stood closer to the window than a doctor expecting patients generally does stand, smiled and bowed.

"It is Mrs. Scott," he observed, as the knocker sounded. "She looks very ill to-day."

Attentive Neal was heard to come forth instantly from his pantry, open the door, and show the lady into the dining-room. Then he made his appearance in his master's room.

"Mrs. Scott, sir!"

Instead of the "Show her in," as Neal expected, Dr. Davenal merely nodded. Mr. Cray made a movement to depart, glancing as he did so, at the very grave face of his senior partner.

"I have vexed you, sir?"

"I feel vexed in this first moment, Mark; I can't deny it," was the candid answer. "It is not altogether that Caroline might have been expected to do better; it is not exclusively that I think her peculiarly unfitted for a making-shift life, or that with regard to her I feel my responsibility is weighty: but it is a mixture of all three."

"You consider, perhaps, I have done wrong to ask for her?"

"I consider you have done wrong to ask for her so prematurely. In your place, I think I should have waited a little while, until circumstances had been more propitious."

"And perhaps have lost Caroline!"

"Nay," said the doctor, "a girl that cannot wait, and be true while she waits, is not worth a brass button."

He quitted the room as he spoke. At the risk of keeping his patients waiting, he must find and question Caroline. His mind was not at ease.

Mr. Cray went out at the hall-door. Before Neal, who was on the alert, had shut it, a carriage drove up to the gate, and stopped with a clatter. A well-appointed close carriage, its servants in claret-coloured livery, and its claret-coloured panels bearing the insignia of England's baronetage — the bloody hand.

The footman leaped down for his orders. Mr. Cray, stepping across the lawn, in too much haste to wind round it by means of the gravel-path, held out his hand with a smile to its only

inmate, a little, grey, nervous-looking woman, in an old-fashioned purple silk dress.

"How are you to-day, Lady Oswald?"

And Neal, with his quiet, cat-like steps, had followed in the wake of Mr. Cray, unseen by that gentleman, and stood behind him in his respectful attention: there might be some message to carry in to his master — leaving three patients, who had entered the gate together, to show themselves in alone.

CHAPTER II.

Lady Oswald's Letter.

THE room at the back, looking into the garden, on the opposite side of the passage to Neal's pantry, was the most charming apartment in all the house. Not for its grandeur; it was small and very simple indeed, compared to the grand drawing-room up stairs: not for its orderly neatness, for it was usually in a litter: a fascinating, pleasant-looking litter; and perhaps that made its charm. It was called the garden-parlour. The great drawing-room was kept sacred by its presiding mistress, to whom you will soon have the honour of an introduction: sacred, and uncomfortably tidy. Not so much as a pocket-handkerchief must be laid for an instant on one of its handsome tables, its luxurious satin sofas and ottomans; not a footstool must be drawn from its appointed place, let tired legs be hanging down with weariness; not a hand-screen must be removed from the handsomely furnished mantelpiece, were lovely cheeks being roasted to crimson. Methodically proper, everything in its appointed spot, must that room be kept: a book put down in the wrong place was treason; a speck of dust all but warning to Jessy, the unhappy housemaid. The dining-room was tidy, too: no extraneous

things were allowed there, it must be kept free for the reception of the patients: the "Times" newspaper and the newest local journal, lay daily on the large mahogany table, and there the litter ended. Perhaps, therefore, it was no wonder that that other room was not always in the order it might have been.

A charming room, nevertheless, on a sunny day. Water-coloured drawings and pencil sketches in plain frames lined the delicately-papered walls, loose music was strewn near the piano and harp, books lay anywhere, pretty little ornamental trifles met the eye, and fancy-work might be seen in more places than one. The glass doors at the window, large and high, stood open to the few wide steps that led to the green lawn — a lawn particularly grateful on a sultry summer's day.

For that lawn lay in the shade; the sun in the afternoon shone full on the front of the house, and the lawn was sheltered. The scent of the roses, the syringa, the heliotrope, and other powerfully-perfumed flowers, filled the air, and butterflies and bees flitted from blossom to blossom. It was quite a contrast to the other side of the house, with its busy street, its hot pavement, its jostling traversers, and its garish sunshine. Here lay the cool shade on the mossy lawn — the quiet and the repose of the tinted flowers.

Seated on the lawn, on a garden-bench, was a young lady, reading. A graceful girl of middle height, with large hazel eyes quite luminous in their brightness, a well-formed gentle face, rather pale, and brown hair that took almost a golden tinge when the sun shone through it. There was no very great beauty to boast of in the face, but it was one of those that the eye likes to rest upon — and love. A far more beautiful face was that of another young girl, who was restlessly moving amidst the side clusters of shrubs and flowers, plucking the

choicest. A face whose beauty could not be denied, with its dark violet eyes, its nearly black hair, and the damask complexion all too bright: these strangely brilliant complexions do not always go with the soundest of constitutions. She was little, fairy-like, somewhat pettish and wilful in her movements. A stranger would say they were sisters, and be puzzled to tell which of the two was the elder, which the younger. There was really no likeness between them, save in the dress — that was precisely similar: a thin gauzy silken material, cool but rich, and no doubt expensive, with a good deal of delicate coloured trimming upon it, and open sleeves over white lace. Sisters they were not — only cousins.

Suddenly there was a scream from the midst of the flowers, and the young lady on the garden-bench raised her eyes to speak.

“What is it, Caroline?”

She came forth in her beauty, flinging down the flowers she had gathered, and holding out the back of her hand. A deep scratch lay right across it.

“Just look! I am always tearing myself with those wild-rose brambles!”

“Poor hand! Sit still, Carine; it is too hot for anything else to-day. What do you want with the flowers, that you need trouble yourself to get them?”

“I don’t know what I want with them. Nothing. Picking them helped to pass away the time.”

“Why are you so restless this afternoon?”

“Am I restless? One can’t be always as quiet as you — read, read, read for ever.”

An amused smile parted the reader’s lips, bringing to view the pretty teeth, so white and regular. “I will retort in nearly your own words, Carine — am I quiet? I think not.”

"Yes you are, except when the boys are at home. You are noisy enough then. I shall go and eat some fruit."

"Lend me your pencil first, Caroline."

Miss Caroline Davenal put her hand into her pocket and could not find her pencil. "I must have left it somewhere indoors," she said. "You'll see it if you look."

"I must mark a passage here."

"What will Mr. Oswald Cray say to your marking his book?"

"Mr. Oswald Cray asked me to mark anything that struck me. It is a delightful book."

Caroline Davenal went joyously down the garden, singing a snatch of a song, as she put her handkerchief over her head to guard it from the sun. The upper half of the long piece of ground was all pleasure and flowers; the lower half all usefulness, vegetables and fruit-trees. Her cousin, book in hand, went up the steps and in at the glass doors to find a pencil. She was bending over the centre table, searching for one, when Dr. Davenal entered the room.

"Is Caroline here?"

"She is in the garden, papa."

Dr. Davenal advanced to the window, and stood at it, ostensibly looking for Caroline. He could not see her; the fruit-trees in the distance had effectually hidden her, and the doctor appeared lost in thought. Presently he spoke, without looking round.

"Sara, did you know that — that — in short, have you ever observed that an attachment was arising between Mr. Cray and Caroline?"

Sara looked up, but did not at once reply. The question was one, put from a father to a daughter, that brought up the blushes on her cheeks in her maiden modesty.

"N—o," she replied, at length. But the no, in its hesitation, sounded almost as much like yes.

"My dear, I did not ask you to deceive me," was the grave answer; "I ask for the truth."

"Oh, papa, you know — you *know* I would not deceive you," she replied, quite in distress. And Dr. Davenal, pained by the tone, drew her to him and kissed her cheek. He knew how good, how loving, how dutiful, was this daughter of his.

"The real truth is this, papa. Very recently, only since a day or two, a faint suspicion has arisen in my mind that it might be so. Caroline has not spoken, and I have had nothing to guide me to it, except the fact that Mr. Cray is so much here. Indeed, I do not know whether it is so or not."

"I believe I have been a little blind," observed Dr. Davenal, speaking quite as much to himself as to his daughter. "The fact is, Sara, I had a notion in my head that some one else had taken a fancy to Caroline; and I suppose I could see nothing beyond it. I speak of Mr. Oswald Cray."

It was well that Dr. Davenal's eyes were fixed on the garden, or he might have wondered at the startled change in his daughter's face. It had turned of one glowing crimson. She moved again to the table, and stood there with her back to the light.

"I suppose I was mistaken; that there was nothing in it, Sara?"

"Nothing, papa, I think; nothing whatever," came the low-toned answer.

"But Mr. Oswald Cray does come here a great deal when he is at Hallingham?" pursued the doctor, as if willing to debate the question.

The crimson grew deeper. Dr. Davenal did not seem to observe that there was no answer.

"How the idea came to arise, I do not understand. Heaven knows I should be the last man in the world to scheme and plan out marriages — for Caroline or for anybody else. Such matters are best left to come about of themselves. But, Sara, I wish one thing — that it had been Mr. Oswald Cray, instead of Mark."

"Do you, papa?" with the blushing face still turned from him.

"Ay, I do. I could have *trusted* her to Oswald. *How* could she choose the other in preference to him?"

Sara lifted her face. Eager words were on her lips — to the effect that perhaps Mr. Oswald Cray might not have chosen Caroline. But they died away unspoken.

"I wish you would go and tell her I want her here, Sara."

Sara slipped by the doctor, passed over the cool lawn to the distant sunny paths, and met her cousin.

"Papa wants you, Carine."

Caroline recoiled in her self-conscious timidity. "What about?" she whispered. "Did he say what about?"

"I think," said Sara slowly, scarcely knowing whether she was doing right to speak or not, "that it is something about Mr. Cray."

For a moment Caroline made no rejoinder. She walked on and had nearly gained the lawn when she turned her head again. Sara had lingered behind.

"Sara! Sara! Did he seem angry?" she whispered.

"Not exactly angry. Vexed, I thought."

Dr. Davenal stood at the glass doors still. He put out his hand as she approached him.

"Did you want me, Uncle Richard?"

"Mr. Cray has been making an application to me, concerning you. Caroline, were you cognisant of it?"

"Now, Uncle Richard! If you are going to be cross, I — I shall be so unhappy."

"When did you ever know me cross?" he gravely rejoined, and Caroline Davenal burst into tears.

"Caroline, my dear, we must put away this childishness. You are but affecting it, and this is a serious moment. I must talk to you very earnestly. Come in, Sara. It is cooler indoors than out."

Sara, who in her delicacy of feeling would have remained outside, went within the room and sat down to the table with her book. Caroline had dried her passing tears, and was stealing a glance at Dr. Davenal.

"You *are* angry, Uncle Richard."

"If I am, Caroline, it is for your sake; a loving anger. My chief emotion, I believe, is surprise. I never gave a thought to this; not a suspicion of it crossed me."

"I fancied you must have guessed it," was the murmured answer.

"Guessed that! No, child. But the blindness was my own, I believe. When we ourselves place one view deliberately before us, it tends to shut out others. I had got it into my head, Carine, that it was to your score we were indebted for the frequent visits of Mr. Oswald Cray."

Caroline lifted her face, and Dr. Davenal observed how genuine was the surprise depicted on it. "Uncle Richard!"

"I see. I see now, child, that the idea was void of foundation. But, Caroline," he gravely added, "I would rather it had been Oswald than Mark. All the world must respect Oswald Cray."

"I should think it *was* void of foundation!" indignantly returned Caroline, resenting the disparagement cast on Mark. "Why, Uncle Richard, Oswald Cray likes Sara a thousand times better than he likes me! But not with that sort of

liking," she hastened to add, lest a construction should be put upon the words which most certainly she never meant to put. "General liking, I mean. Oswald Cray's heart is buried in his ambition, in his busy life; he gives little thought to aught else. Uncle Richard, I would not marry Oswald Cray if he were worth his weight in gold. He would find fault with me all day long."

"Well, well; let us drop Oswald Cray, and return to the point, Caroline. If" —

"Lady Oswald, sir."

The interruption came from Neal. They had not heard him open the door, and the announcement was the first intimation of his presence. Of course all private conversation was at an end, and the doctor half groaned as he turned to Lady Oswald. She came in, her warm cashmere scarf drawn round her, and her purple gown held up gracefully on the right side, after the style of walking in the fashionable world in the days when Lady Oswald was young.

Lady Oswald was one of those imaginary invalids who give more trouble to their medical attendants than a whole score of patients with real maladies. Fussy and fidgety, she exacted constant attendance from Dr. Davenal. She paid him well; but she worried him nearly out of his life. On his leisure days, when he could really afford the visit to her, and the quarter-of-an-hour's chat spent in condoling with her upon her array of ailments and in giving her the gossip of Hallingham, he spared the time with a good grace: but in a season of pressure, he did chafe at having to pay this daily visit, when dying men were waiting for him. He had been with her that morning between ten and eleven: Neal had said she called while he was out; and now here she was again! Once or twice latterly he had sent Mr. Cray in his stead, and

she had not seemed to object to it. But she had come for a different object now.

"Only two minutes' conversation with you, doctor," she said, in a voice naturally feeble. "You must spare it me, though it is Tuesday afternoon, and I see your dining-room's getting full. Neal said you were here, so I came in straight, not to be confounded with the patients. Only look at this letter which was delivered to me this morning, and see what it must have been to my nerves. Parkins has been giving me red lavender ever since."

"But you know, Lady Oswald, that I object to your taking red lavender."

"What am I to do when a shock like that comes to me? Do read it, doctor."

Dr. Davenal, feeling that he had no time for letters or nerves just then, was yet compelled in good manners to accede. He opened the note, which was a very short one, and ran his eyes over the contents; once and then again; the first time he did not quite master them.

It was written to Lady Oswald by her landlord, a gentleman of the name of Low. It appeared that Mr. Low had some little time back received an intimation from the railway company that they should require to take a small portion of the grounds attached to the residence occupied by Lady Oswald, for the purpose of erecting certain sheds necessary at that bend of the line. This note was to inform her that he had given his consent, and it ended with a polite hope and belief that neither the sheds nor the process of their erection would prove any annoyance to her.

Dr. Davenal folded the letter when read. Lady Oswald looked at him. "What would you advise me to do?" she asked, in a fretful tone.

"Indeed, Lady Oswald, I do not see what you can do," he thoughtfully answered, "except submit to it."

"Submit to it! submit to their erecting railway sheds in my very garden!" she ejaculated in astonishment.

"From the very first hour that I knew they were carrying that new line of rail close to your grounds, I felt sure it would prove an annoyance to you in some shape or other," observed Dr. Davenal, speaking more to himself than to Lady Oswald. "It is a great pity, but we all have to submit occasionally to these untoward things, Lady Oswald, as we go through life."

"I shall not submit to this," she resolutely returned. "They have no more right to erect sheds on my grounds, than they have to erect them upon me. I shall forbid it."

"But the power to do so does not lie with you," objected Dr. Davenal. "You are but a tenant on lease. In point of fact, I do not suppose such power lies with any one, not even with Low himself. The railway companies seem to do pretty much as they please in the kingdom. Mr. Low will be sure to get well paid, and his consent, according to the tenor of this note, is already given."

Lady Oswald pushed her grey hair nervously from her brow. "Dr. Davenal, I don't *believe* that the law has power so to annoy innocent people and drive them from their homes. Do you know how long I have lived in that house?"

"A great many years now. Ever since the death of Sir John."

"I have lived in it fourteen years, and I will not be driven forth at their pleasure. I expected to die in it, and I will die in it. If they attempt to touch my grounds, I shall have them warned off as trespassers, and I will keep a couple of policemen on the watch day and night."

Dr. Davenal did not then dispute the policy of the avowed

plan with her, or point out its futility. In her present mood he knew it would be useless, even if he had the time, to attempt it.

"Because I am a widow woman they think that they can put upon me with impunity," she resumed; "but they will find their mistake. I have telegraphed for Mr. Oswald Cray, and expect him down by night time."

"You have telegraphed for him?" cried Dr. Davenal.

"Of course I have. Who else is there to take my part, doctor, save him or you? That letter was delivered just after you left me this morning, and I sent to the telegraph at once. Oswald can fight them; and he has influence: they will be clever to overreach *him*."

Dr. Davenal opened his mouth to speak, but suppressed the impulsive words upon his tongue. To what end recall to Lady Oswald's attention the fact that Mr. Oswald Cray, as one of the engineers to the line, must necessarily be against her, if she had not the sense to remember it? He said a few words to the effect that he *must* go to his patients, gave Lady Oswald a half promise to see her that night, and left her to be entertained by his daughter.

"My dear, why need Miss Carine have run away from me the moment I came in?"

Sara smiled. "Not from you, Lady Oswald; I think she wanted to run from us all. And perhaps she thought your visit was only to papa."

"How is Miss Davenal?"

"Quite well. Will you see her? She is in the drawing-room."

Lady Oswald hesitated.

"My dear, of course I should be glad to see her; I wish to pay her every respect; but — you know, it is so great a trial

to me — with my little weak voice. However, I will go up, as I am here. *Is her deafness better?*”

“Not at all,” was Sara’s answer. “I don’t suppose it ever will be better. It gets worse, we think, as she grows old.”

“Grows what?” cried Lady Oswald.

Sara had quick perceptions, and she felt that the word old, as applied to her aunt, had offended Lady Oswald’s ear. How changed do our ideas of age become, as our own years change! To Sara Davenal with her twenty years, her aunt, verging on fifty, was old; to Lady Oswald, who would count seventy-one her next birth-day, Miss Davenal seemed but as a youngish woman!

Lady Oswald stepped slowly up the wide staircase, one foot at a time. Sara followed her, and threw open the door of the handsome drawing-room. A large, square room, beautiful as a show place; and to keep it beautiful was the hobby of Miss Bettina Davenal.

CHAPTER III.

Miss Bettina Davenal.

MISS DAVENAL sat in her usual seat near the window, her straight figure bolt upright, her knitting needles plying fast their work, the small inlaid table at her right hand holding the open pearl basket of wool. How many stockings, socks, sleeves, and chest-protectors, were knitted by Miss Davenal in the course of the year, the poor alone could tell — for they were the recipients. Hallingham surmised that she must spend half her income upon wool. There’s no doubt she was a charitable, well-meaning woman at heart, but she did not always show it in her manner.

A beautiful woman in her day must have been Bettina Davenal, with her pure complexion and her classical features.

But the grey eyes had a cold, hard look in them now; and the nose, across the high bridge of which the delicate skin was drawn so tightly, was almost painfully thin. The name Bettina, had been bestowed on her at the request of a godmother, a lady of Italian origin; not an ugly name, but somewhat long for the everyday use of English tongues, and those familiar with her occasionally shortened it into "Miss Bett," a liberty that was resented by Miss Davenal. She laboured under that troublesome defect, intense deafness, and also under the no less troublesome conviction (not unfrequently accompanying it) that she was not deaf at all. Her hair, of a pale flaxen, soft and abundant still, was worn in smooth braids, and was surmounted by a rich lace head-dress, very high.

She need not have added to her height: she was tall enough without it; as was seen when she rose to receive Lady Oswald. A straight-down, thin, upright figure, without crinolines or cordings, her grey damask dress falling in wrapt folds around her as she held forth her mittened hand.

"I hope I see you better, Lady Oswald."

The tone was unnaturally high: you may have noticed that it is so sometimes in deaf people. Lady Oswald, with her weak nerves, would have put her hands to her ears had she done as she liked.

"I am not well to-day. I am worse than usual. I have had a most unpleasant shock, Miss Davenal; an upset."

"A what?" cried Miss Davenal, putting her hand to her ear.

"An upset."

"Bless my heart!" cried Miss Davenal; "did your carriage run away?"

"Tell her, Sara," groaned Lady Oswald. "I shall be hoarse for two days if I call out like this."

"Lady Oswald has had some unpleasant news, aunt. She has received notice that they are going to run the railway through her grounds."

Miss Davenal caught a word or so, and looked terrified. "Received notice that they are going to run a railway through her! What do you mean!"

"Not through her," said Sara, putting her lips close to the deaf ears. "Through her grounds."

"But I'd not let them," cried Miss Davenal, hearing now. "I'd not let them, Lady Oswald."

"I won't," screamed Lady Oswald at the top of her voice. "I have sent for Mr. Oswald Cray."

Miss Davenal was dubious. "What good will that do? Is it to pelt upon them? I hate those wicked railways."

"Is what to pelt upon them?"

"The clay. Didn't you say you had sent for some clay?"

"Oh dear! Sara, do make her understand."

Poor Sara had to do her best. "Not clay, Aunt Bettina; Mr. Oswald Cray."

Aunt Bettina nodded her stately head. "I like Mr. Oswald Cray. He is a favourite of mine, Lady Oswald."

"As he is of everybody's, Miss Davenal," returned Lady Oswald. "I'd have remembered him in my will but for offending the Oswald family. They are dreadfully prejudiced."

"Pinched!" echoed Miss Davenal. "Where's he pinched?"

"Prejudiced, Aunt Bettina. Lady Oswald says the Oswald family are prejudiced."

"You need not roar out in that way, Sara; I can hear, I hope. I am not so deaf as all that comes to. What's he prejudiced at? — the railway? He ought not to be, he is one of its engineers."

"Not Mr. Oswald Cray, aunt. The Oswald family. They are prejudiced against him."

"If you speak to me again in that manner, Sara, I shall complain to your papa. One would think you were calling out to somebody at the top of the chimney. As if I and Lady Oswald did not know that the Oswald family are prejudiced against Oswald Cray? We don't want you to tell it us from a speaking-trumpet; we knew it before you were born. I don't think he cares for their prejudices, Lady Oswald," Miss Davenal added, turning to her.

"He would be very foolish if he did. I don't. They are prejudiced, you know, against me."

"I think the world must be coming to an end, with all these rails and stations and sheds," fretfully spoke Miss Davenal.

"The news has made me ill," said Lady Oswald, who liked nothing half so well as to speak of her own ailments. "I was getting better, as Dr. Davenal can tell you, but this will throw me back for weeks. My maid has been giving me red lavender ever since."

Miss Davenal looked at her with a puzzled stare.

"That is poison, is it not?"

"What is poison?"

"Red lead."

"I said red lavender," cried Lady Oswald. "It is very good for the spirits: a few drops taken on a lump of sugar. Red lav-en-der."

Miss Davenal resolutely shook her head. "Nasty stuff!" she cried. "Red lavender never did anybody good yet, Lady Oswald. Leave it off; leave it off."

"I don't touch it once in a month in an ordinary way," screamed Lady Oswald. "Only when anything beyond common arises to flurry me."

Miss Bettina stared at her. "What common is flooded? It is dry weather."

Lady Oswald cast a helpless look at Sara. "Flurried Aunt Bettina," said the young lady. "Lady Oswald said when she was flurried."

Miss Bettina was not in the least grateful for the assistance. She pushed away her niece with her elbow. It was in fact next to high treason for Sara to attempt to assist Miss Davenal's deafness. "I should not allow things to flurry me, Lady Oswald. I never was flurried in my life."

"Temperaments are constituted differently," returned Lady Oswald.

"Temper!" cried Miss Davenal, as angrily as politeness would allow her, "what has temper to do with it? Who accuses me of temper?"

"Tem-per-a-ment," corrected Lady Oswald, cracking her voice. "Sara, I *must* go."

She rose quickly; she could not stand the interview any longer; but in spite of the misapprehensions they took leave of each other cordially. The same scene occurred every time they met: as it did whenever conversation was attempted with Miss Davenal. It cannot be denied that she heard better at times than at others, occasionally tolerably well; and hence perhaps the source, or partially so, of her own belief that her deafness was but of a slight nature. When alone with the familiar family voices, and in quiet times, she could hear; but in moments of surprise and excitement, in paying or receiving visits, the ears were nearly hopeless.

Neal attended Lady Oswald to her carriage, waiting there at the gate with its powdered coachman and footman, to the gratification of the juvenile street Arabs of Hallingham; the same ever-assiduous, superior servant, quite dignified in his

respectability. Lady Oswald believed him perfection — that there was not another such servant in the world.

“Your mistress grows more distressingly deaf than ever, Neal,” she remarked, as he put her dress straight in the carriage, her own footman resigning the office to him with almost the same submission that he might have resigned it to Mr. Cray, had the young surgeon been at hand to assist her in, as he had been to assist her out.

“She does, my lady. It is a great affliction. Home,” loftily added Neal to the servants: and he bowed low as the carriage drove away.

CHAPTER IV.

Oswald Cray.

THE house of Lady Oswald was an old-fashioned red brick mansion of moderate size, two stories in height only, and with gable ends. It was exceedingly comfortable inside, and was surrounded by rather extensive grounds. At the opposite end of the town to the station, it might have been thought that that vulgar innovation, the railroad, so especially obnoxious to Lady Oswald, would at least have spared it offensive contact; but that was not to be. There was no accounting for the curves and tracks taken by those lines of the junction, and one of them had gone off at a tangent to skirt the very boundary of her land.

Seated in the front drawing-room, the one chiefly used by Lady Oswald, was a woman of some forty years, attired in a neat green-coloured gown, and cap with white ribbons. This was Parkins, Lady Oswald's maid, recently promoted to be somewhat of a companion, for Lady Oswald began to dislike being much alone. A well-meaning faithful woman, with weak eyes and weak will, and given to tears on very

slight occasions. Parkins had also been lately made house-keeper as well as companion, and the weekly accounts connected with that department threatened to be the bane of Parkins's life. Add them up, she could not; make them come right, she could not: and she could get neither mercy nor assistance from Lady Oswald, who had always been her own account-keeper, and never found any trouble in it. Two tradesmen's books were before Parkins now, and she was bending over them in despair, during her lady's absence.

"I can't as much as read the figures," she groaned: "how then, am I to add 'em up? Last week there was an over-charge of ten shillings in this very butcher's book, and my lady found it out, and hasn't done talking to me for it yet. It *isn't* my fault: all folks are not born with a head for figures. And why can't tradespeople make their figures plain?"

Had she not been so absorbed by the book and its complications, she might have seen the approach of a visitor. A tall and very gentlemanly man of some eight-and-twenty years, with a countenance that would have been remarkably frank and pleasing but for the expression of pride pervading it: nay, that *was* frank and pleasing in spite of the pride. He could not help the pride; it was innate, born with him; he did not make his own face, and the lines of pride were inherent in it. The pale features were regular, the hair dark, the eyes dark blue, and lying rather deep in the head; good and honest eyes they were, searching and truthful: and when he smiled, as he was smiling now, it made full amends for deficiencies, obliterating every trace of pride, and imparting a singular charm to the face.

His approach had been discerned by one of the maid-servants, and she had come to the hall-door and was holding it open. It was at her he had smiled, for in manner he was exceedingly affable. Perhaps the very consciousness of the

pride that clung to him, and was his besetting sin, rendered him resolute that in manner at least he should not offend.

"How are you, Susan? Is Lady Oswald within?"

"No, sir, my lady's out," was the girl's reply, as she dropped a curtsy. "Parkins is in the drawing-room, sir, I think: I daresay she can tell whether my lady will be long."

He laid on the hall-table a small roll of paper or parchment that he carried, drew off a dusty light overcoat, and took up the roll again. Susan opened the drawing-room door.

"Mr. Oswald Cray."

Parkins gave a scream. Parkins was somewhat addicted to giving screams when startled or surprised. Starting up from her chair and her perplexing books, she stood staring at him, as if unable to take in the fact of his presence. Parkins believed in marvels, and thought one had been enacted then.

"Oh, sir! how *did* you come? You must have travelled surely on the telegraph wires?"

"Not I," answered Mr. Oswald Cray, smiling at her astonishment, but not understanding its cause. "I left London by rail this morning, Parkins."

"A telegraph message went up for you an hour or two ago, sir," continued Parkins. "My lady has had bad news, sir, and she sent for you."

"I had no message. I must have left London previously. What bad news has she had?"

"It's them railway people, sir," explained Parkins. "They have been writing a letter to my lady — leastways the landlord has — saying that they are going to take these grounds and build upon them. I haven't seen her so upset for a long while, sir. When she got a bit better from the shock and had

sent to the telegraph, she ordered the carriage, and set off to tell Dr. Davenal."

"Do you expect her to be long?" he asked, thinking that, if so, he might go about some business he had to do, and come back again.

"I expect her every minute, sir; she has been gone a great deal longer than I thought she'd be away."

He walked to the window, unrolled the parchment, and began to look at it. It seemed a sort of map, drawn with ink. Parkins, who, whatever might be the companionship she was admitted to by her mistress, knew her place better than to remain in the presence of Mr. Oswald Cray, gathered up her account-book and her pen and ink, and prepared to quit the room.

"Shall I order you any refreshment, sir?" she stopped to ask.

"Not any, thank you."

She closed the door, leaving him deep in his parchment. Another minute, and the carriage was seen bowling quickly up. He went out to meet it: and Lady Oswald gave a scream as Parkins had done, and wanted to know how he had got there.

"I came down on my own account, Lady Oswald," he said, as he gave her his arm to lead her in. "My visit is a purposed one to you."

"I'm sure you are very good, Oswald! It is not often that you honour me with a visit. When you are staying in the neighbourhood for days and days, a simple call of ceremony is about all I get."

His lips parted with that peculiar smile which made his face at these moments so attractive. "When I am in the neighbourhood, Lady Oswald, business nearly overwhelms me. I have not much time to call my own."

Lady Oswald untied her bonnet, and threw herself into a chair: only the drive to Dr. Davenal's and back had tired her. Parkins came into the room to take her things, but she waved her hand sharply, impatient at the interruption. "Presently, presently," — and Parkins left them alone again.

"Oswald, do you know what a cruel letter I have had this morning? They want to bring that wretched railway through my grounds."

"Not the railway," he said, correcting her. "They are proposing to build some sheds upon the boundaries of them."

"You know about it, then?"

"Yes, I came down to acquaint you, and I am sorry you should have heard of it from any one else first. I could have spared you one half the alarm and annoyance it seems to have caused. Look here. This is the plan."

He spread the paper out before her. He pointed out the very small portion of the grounds, and in the remotest part of them, not in sight of the house, or the parts ever walked in by herself, that was proposed to be taken: he assured her that the projected sheds were but small sheds, for barrows, trucks, and such things to stand under; that they would, in point of fact, be no annoyance to her, that she never need see or hear them. All in vain. Lady Oswald had set her mind bitterly against the innovation; she could neither be persuaded nor soothed, and she felt vexed with Mr. Oswald Cray that he should attempt it.

"It is very well for you to praise it," she resentfully said. "Your interest lies in the line, not in me. Perhaps they have bribed you to say all this."

For a single moment his face grew dark, and its haughty pride shone out quite repellantly; the next he was smiling his sweet smile. None knew better than Oswald Cray how rebelliously false the tongue is apt to be in moments of irritation.

"Dear Lady Oswald, you know that it is foreign to my nature to cause needless pain. When this news reached my ears a week ago, for the plan did not originate with me, I bestirred myself to see whether it might not be relinquished; whether, in short, the sheds could not be erected on any other portion of the line. But I find that there is no other portion available so close to the station."

"There's that piece of waste ground midway between this and the station," she answered. "Why can they not take that?"

"Another station is to be made there. One for goods."

"Another station! Do they think to bring all the world to Hallingham?"

"They are bringing a great many lines of rails to it."

"But they need not disturb my possessions to make room for them!" she quickly retorted. "Surely your interest might get this spared to me!"

In vain Mr. Oswald Cray strove to convince her that on this point he had no influence whatever. Nay, he confessed to her, in his candid truth, that as one of the engineers to the line, he could only acquiesce in the expediency of that part being used for the sheds, that there was no other spot so available.

"I drew this plan out myself," he said, "partly from our charts of the line, partly from my personal recollection of your grounds. I wished to demonstrate to you how very little a portion of them is, in fact, required. Will you put on your bonnet again, Lady Oswald, and walk with me to the spot? I will show you the exact measure they intend to take."

"No, I won't," said Lady Oswald, angrily. "And you ought not to turn against me, Oswald. It is the principle of the thing I go upon; the resistance that, in my opinion, should be universally made to these intrusive railways, which are

cutting up the country and ruining it. If they wanted to take but one foot of my ground; if they only wanted that dry ditch that skirts it, they should never have it by my consent, and I will hold out against it to the last. Now you know."

She sat nervously unpinning her cashmere scarf her hands trembling so that she could scarcely hold the gold pins as she took them out. Oswald Cray slowly rolled up the parchment. He had come down from town at a very busy moment, when he could ill spare the time, with the sole hope of soothing the news to her, of putting her in good humour with what must inevitably be. He had received many little kindnesses from her in his life, especially in his boyhood; and he was one to treasure up the remembrance of kindness shown, and repay it if he could.

It may seem a very trifling thing, this project of erecting a few low, trumpery sheds; as may Lady Oswald's inveterate objection to it. But it is on trifles that the great events of life turn; and, but for this project of the sheds, this not-to-be-conquered refusal, the greater portion of this story need never have been written.

CHAPTER V.

Retrospect.

OF some note in the county, though poor for their rank, were the Oswalds of Thorndyke. Thorndyke, their country seat, was situated about five miles from Hallingham, and had been generally made the constant residence of the reigning baronet. It was a fine old place; the dyke surrounding it, or dike, as you may like to spell it — from which the place no doubt had partially taken its name — was of remarkable width. It was filled up in the time of Lady Oswald's husband, the *third* baronet of his name; and fine pleasure-

grounds might be seen now where unwholesome water had once stagnated. Possibly that water had been the remote and unsuspected cause of the dying off of so many of the house's children — as they had died in the old days.

The *second* baronet, Sir Oswald Oswald, lost five children in succession. Two daughters and a son alone lived to grow up: and perhaps it had been as well for the peace of Sir Oswald and his wife had those three likewise died in infancy; for pain they all brought home in one shape or other. They were self-willed and disobedient; preferring their own ways. The son wished to go into the army: his father had the greatest possible aversion to it; but he persisted, and went, in spite of remonstrance. The younger daughter, Frances, married an old man for his rank: Sir Oswald objected to it; the man's character was of startling notoriety; but Frances took her own will and married him. A few short months only, and she was back again at Thorndyke, driven to take refuge from her husband in her father's home. The elder daughter, Mary, married Mr. Cray, a gentleman of no account, in comparison with the Oswalds of Thorndyke. To this the most strenuous objection of all was made by Sir Oswald and his lady — in their haughty pride they looked down with utter contempt upon Mr. Cray. Miss Oswald disputed the grounds of their objection, urging that Mr. Cray, though of no particular note, was at least of gentle blood and breeding, and though his means might be small, *she* deemed them sufficient. It was of no use: she could make no impression on her father and mother, she could not shake their refusal of consent, and she married Mr. Cray without it. Public opinion on the matter was divided. Some took Miss Oswald's part. She was of an age to judge for herself; being, in fact, no longer very young; and there appeared no good reason, save that he was not wealthy, for objecting to Mr. Cray. But her family — father,

mother, brother, sister — bitterly resented it, and said she had disgraced them.

Mr. Cray had about eight hundred a year, derivable from money in the funds, and he lived in the Abbey at Hallingham. The Oswalds enjoyed some three or four thousand a year, landed property, and they lived at Thorndyke, and were baronets, and very grand. Of course there was a great difference; but some thought the difference might have been got over by Sir Oswald. Some went so far as to say that Mr. Cray, with his fine manly person and good conduct, was a better man than that shrivelled old lord who was breaking the heart of his poor wife, the younger daughter. Sir Oswald and Lady Oswald could not be brought to see it; none of the Oswalds could see it; and, take them altogether, brothers, cousins, uncles and nephews, there was a large family of them.

Mary Oswald married Mr. Cray, and he brought her home to Hallingham Abbey, and her friends never saw her after; that is, they never would recognise her. Many a Tuesday, on which day the family from Thorndyke would drive into Hallingham in their carriage and four — as was the habit with some of the county people — did they pass her without notice. They would be in the large close carriage, the old baronet and my lady, and their daughter Frances — who had no home now but theirs — opposite to them, and they would see Mrs. Cray at the Abbey windows, alone or with her husband, as the case might be, for their road took them past it, and all the greeting they gave her was a stony stare. Time went on, and there appeared a baby at her side, a pretty little fellow in long petticoats, held in his nurse's arms. That baby was named Oswald Oswald, and was the Mr. Oswald Cray whom you have seen: but the stare from the baronet's carriage was not less stony than before.

A twelvemonth more, when Oswald could just begin to run about in his pretty white frocks, and get his sturdy legs into grief, his hands into mischief, another child was born, and died. Poor Mrs. Cray died herself a few weeks afterwards. People said she had grown weak, fretting after Thorndyke, after her father and mother, lamenting their hardness, regretting her own disobedience; but people are prone to talk, and often say things for which there's not a shadow of foundation. She died without having seen her friends — unreconciled; and when Mr. Cray wrote to Sir Oswald a very proper letter, not familiar, but giving the details of her death, no answer was accorded him. Mrs. Cray, as Mary Oswald, had possessed a small income independent of her father, and this on her death passed to her little son. It was just one hundred and six pounds per year, and she made it her dying request that he should use the surname of Oswald in addition to that of Cray — should be known henceforth as Master Oswald Cray.

And it was so; and when the boy first entered a noted public school for gentlemen's sons, far away from Hallingham, and the boys saw him sign his exercises and copies "O. Oswald Cray," they asked him what the "O" was for. For his christian name, he answered. Was not Oswald his christian name? they wanted to know. Yes, his christian and his surname both, he said, Oswald Oswald. It was his grandpapa's christian and surname, Sir Oswald Oswald. Oh! was *he* his grandfather? asked the boys. Yes; but — Oswald added in his innate love of truth — he had never been the better for him, Sir Oswald had never spoken to him in his life; there was something unpleasant between him and his papa, he did not know what. No; at that stage of the boy's age he was unconscious what the breach was, or that his dead mother had made it.

Poor Oswald Cray had not had a very happy childhood's life; he scarcely knew what was meant by the words, home ties, home love. *He* had never enjoyed them. There was a second Mrs. Cray, and a second family, and she did not like the boy Oswald, or care that he should be at home. He was but four years old when he was despatched to a far-off preparatory school, where he was to stay the holidays as well as the half years. Now and then, about once in two years or so, he would be had home for a fortnight at Christmas, and Mr. Cray would make an occasional journey to see him.

It was at ten years old that he was removed to the public school, where the boys asked him the meaning of the "O." Before that time came, grief had penetrated to the family of Sir Oswald Oswald. His only son and heir had died in battle in India; His daughter Frances, who had never gone back to the old lord, had died at Thorndyke; and Sir Oswald and his wife were childless. Neither survived the year, and when Oswald was eleven years old, and getting to hold his own in the school, the title had devolved on the next brother, Sir John. Sir John was sixty when he came into it, and had no children. He had offended the Oswald family in the same way that Mary Oswald had offended them, by marrying a lady whose family was not as good as his own.

That lady was the present widow, Lady Oswald, now lamenting over the threatened innovation of the railway sheds. Sir John Oswald enjoyed the title for four years only, and then it lapsed to a cousin, for Sir John had no children. The cousin, Sir Philip, enjoyed it still and lived at Thorndyke, and his eldest son would succeed him. They were proud also, those present Oswalds of Thorndyke, and never had spoken to Oswald Cray in their lives. The prejudices of old Sir Oswald had descended upon them, and Sir Philip and Lady Oswald would pass Oswald Cray, if by chance they met

him, with as stony a stare as had ever greeted his poor mother.

Perhaps the only one of the whole Oswald family upon whom the prejudices had not descended, was the widow of Sir John. Upon the death of her husband, when she had to leave Thorndyke, she took on lease the house at Hallingham, and had never removed from it. Her jointure was not a large one; but Sir John had bequeathed to her certain monies absolutely, and these were at her own disposal. These monies were also being added to yearly, for she did not spend all her income; so that it was supposed Lady Oswald would leave a pretty little sum behind her, by which somebody would benefit. There was no lack of "somebodies" to look out for it, for Lady Oswald had two nephews with large families, both of whom wanted help badly. One of these nephews, the Reverend Mr. Stephenson, was a poor curate, struggling to bring up his seven children upon one hundred a year. Lady Oswald sent him a little help now and then; but she was not fond of giving away her money.

The pride and prejudices of the family had not fallen upon her, and she noticed and welcomed Oswald Cray. He was fifteen when she settled at Hallingham, and she had him to spend his first holidays with her afterwards. She had continued to notice him ever since; to invite him occasionally, and she was in her way fond of him; but it was not in the nature of Lady Oswald to feel much fondness for any one.

And yet, though not in her inmost heart cherishing the prejudices of the Oswalds, she did in a degree adopt them. She could not be independent and brave them off. Conscious that she was looked down upon herself by the Oswalds, she could not feel sufficiently free to take up her own standard of conduct, and fling those prejudices utterly to the winds. Upon tolerably good terms with Thorndyke, paying it oc-

casional state visits, and receiving state visits from it in return, she did not openly defy all Thorndyke's prejudices. Though she acknowledged Oswald Cray as a relative, received him as an equal, there it ended, and she never, by so much as a word or a nod, recognised his father, Mr. Cray. She never had known him, and she did not enter upon the acquaintance. But in this there was nothing offensive, nothing that need have hurt the feelings of the Crays; Lady Oswald and they were strangers, and she was not bound to make their acquaintance, any more than she was that of other gentlepeople about Hallingham, moving in a sphere somewhat inferior to herself.

Mr. Cray had continued to reside at Hallingham Abbey, and to live at it in a style that his income did not justify. However the Oswalds may have despised him, he did not despise himself; neither did Hallingham. Mr. Cray of the Abbey was of note in the town; Mr. Cray was courted and looked up to; Mr. Cray went to dinner-parties, and gave them; Mr. Cray's wife was fashionable and extravagant, and so were Mr. Cray's daughters; and altogether Mr. Cray was a great man, and spent thousands where he ought to have spent hundreds.

He had four children, not counting Oswald — Marcus and three daughters — and it cost something to bring them out in the world. Marcus, changeable and vacillating by nature, fixed upon half a dozen professions or occupations for himself, before he decided upon the one he finally embraced — that of a doctor. Chance, more than anything else, caused him to decide on this at last. Altogether, what with home extravagance and the cost of his children, Mr. Cray became an embarrassed man; and when he died, about two years previous to the opening of this story, a very slender support was left for his wife and daughters. His will did not even

mention Oswald. Two or three hundred pounds were left to Marcus — the rest to Mrs. Cray, for her life, and to go to her daughters afterwards.

Oswald had not expected any. Where a home gives no affection, it is not very likely to give money. When Oswald had come of age he found that his own income, of which his father was trustee, had not only been spent upon his education, but the principal had been very considerably drawn upon as well — in fact, it would take years to redeem it. “I was obliged to do it, Oswald,” his father said. “I could not limit your educational expenses, and there was the heavy premium to pay in Parliament Street. I’d willingly have paid all cost myself; but it has not been in my power.”

Oswald was not ungenerous. He grasped his father’s hand and warmly thanked him, saying it was only right his own money should pay his cost when there were so many at home to educate. Ah, it was not the *money* he regretted. Had every sixpence of it been spent — why, it was spent — he was young and strong, with a good profession before him, and brains and hands to work it, he could make his own way in the world, and he should make it. No, it was not the money; but what Oswald had been hurt at, was the manner in which they had estranged him from his home; had kept him from the father’s affection which he had yearned for. He knew that the fault had been Mrs. Cray’s; that his father held him aloof only under her influence. He did not allow himself to blame his father even in his own heart; but he could not help thinking that were he ever placed in a similar situation, he should openly love and cherish his first-born son, in spite of all the second wives in the world. Oswald had yet to learn by experience how utterly futile is that boast which we are all apt to make — that we should act so differently in other people’s places. Never was there a truer aphorism than the homely

saying: "Nobody knows where the shoe pinches save those who wear it."

Oswald Cray had been born proud: it might be detected in every tone of his decisive voice, in every turn of his well-set head, in every lineament of his haughty features. He could not help it. It is well to repeat this assertion, because pride is sometimes looked upon as a failing demanding heavy reproach. There it was, and he could not shake it out of him any more than he could shake out his other qualities or feelings. It was discerned in him when a little child; it was seen conspicuously in his school-days; it reigned paramount in his early manhood. "The boy has the proud spirit of his grandfather Sir Oswald," quoth the gossips; and no doubt it was from that quarter that it had come. Only in his later days, those years between twenty and thirty, when thought and experience were coming to him, did it grow less observable, for he had the good sense to endeavour to keep it in due subjection.

But it was not a bad sort of pride, after all. It was not the foolish pride of the Oswalds generally, who deemed everybody beneath them; it was rather that pride of innate rectitude which keeps its owner from doing a mean, a wrong, or a disgraceful action. It was the pride of self-esteem, of self-reliance; that feeling which says, "I must not do so and so, for I should disgrace myself — those careless-living men around me may do these things, but I am superior to it." Other young men might plunge into the world's follies; pride, if no better motive, kept Oswald Cray from them. He could not for very shame have borne a tainted conscience; he could not have shown a clear outside to the world, open and fearless, knowing that his heart was foul within.

He was not proud of his family descent from the Oswalds. Quite the contrary. He found no cause to pride himself on

either the Oswalds or the Crays. So far as the Oswalds went, many a hundred times had he wished they were no connections of his. All his life he had received from them nothing but slights; and slights to a man of Oswald Cray's temperament bring the deepest mortification. He knew now how they had treated his mother; he felt to his very heart how they despised himself. If he could have changed his dead grandfather into somebody else, a little less foolish and a great deal less grand, he had been better pleased.

But this very isolation from his mother's family had tended to foster his own pride — the mortification which it induced had fostered it — just as the isolation from his own home, from his father and the second family, had contributed to render him self-reliant. It is not your home darling, bred up in fond dependence, sheltered from the world's storms as a hot-house flower, who becomes the self-reliant man, but he who is sent out early to rough it, who has nobody to care for him, or to love him, in all the wide earth.

Not a more self-reliant man lived than Oswald Cray. He was sure, under God, of *himself*, of his good conduct; and I think it is about the best surety that a man or woman can carry with them through life. In moments of doubt, perplexity, difficulty, whatever might be its nature, he turned to his own heart and took its counsel — and it never failed him. It was with himself he deliberated; it was his own good judgment, his right feeling that he called to his aid. He had an honest, upright nature, was strictly honourable: a proud man, if it is the proper sort of pride, nearly always is so. His ambition was great, but not extravagant; it did not soar him aloft in flights of fancy, vain, generally speaking, as they are absurd. He was determined to rise to the summit of his profession — that of a civil engineer — but he entertained no foolish dreams beyond it. To attain to that, he would use

every diligence, every effort, consistent with uprightness and honour; and dishonourable efforts Oswald Cray would have scorned to use, would have shaken them from him as he shook a summer-day's dust from his shoes.

He was connected with a firm of high repute in Parliament Street: Bracknell and Street. Oswald Cray was a partner, but his name did not appear as yet; and, as you may readily imagine, the lion's share of the profits did not fall to him. In fact, he had entered it very much as his half brother had entered the house of Dr. Davenal — to obtain a footing. For more substantial recompense he was content to wait. Bracknell and Street were engineers to the Hallingham line, and to Oswald Cray had been entrusted its working and management.

He had said to Lady Oswald, in answer to her reproach of his not calling to see her more frequently that his time when at Hallingham was much occupied. True, so far: but the chief and real motive which kept him from her house was a sort of sensitive feeling relating to her money. It was not that he dreaded people's saying he was looking after it: he would have scorned that kind of reproach: but he did dread lest any degree of intimacy, any pushing of himself in her way, should cause her to leave it to him. I am not sure that you will quite understand this; understand him or his feeling. None but a man of the nicest honour, who was entrenched, as it were, in his own pride, the pride of rectitude, could have felt this delicacy. He did not want Lady Oswald's money; he knew that he had no claim upon any of it, no right to it, and he would not put himself in her way more than he could help, even as a passing visitor. Gossiping Hallingham had said, "My lady would be leaving her nest-egg to Mr. Oswald Cray." The gossip had penetrated to Mr. Oswald Cray's ears, and his only notice of it was a haughty gesture of contempt:

but in all probability it tended to increase his dislike to go to Lady Oswald's. During these business visits at Hallingham, he sojourned at a respectable inn of the old school, a little beyond the town and the Abbey Gardens, called the Apple Tree, and had recently become more intimate with the family of Dr. Davenal.

Driven forth all his life from his father's home, allowed to enter it but at rare intervals, and then as a formally-invited guest, it cannot be supposed that Oswald Cray entertained any strong affection for his half-brother and sisters. Such a state of things would have been unnatural, quite in opposition to ordinary probabilities. It would be wrong to say that they disliked each other; but there was certainly no love: civil indifference may best express the feeling. Marcus, the eldest child of the second Mrs. Cray, was from three to four years younger than Oswald. It had been better that Mrs. Cray had fostered an affection between these boys, but she did just the reverse. She resented the contempt cast on her husband by the Oswalds of Thorndyke; she resented, most unreasonably, the fact that the little money of the first Mrs. Cray should have descended at once to Oswald; she even resented the child's having taken the distinguishing name: he was Oswald Cray, her son, plain Cray. How worse than foolish this was of her, how wrong, perhaps the woman might yet learn: but altogether it did excite her against Oswald; and she had kept him aloof from her own children, and encouraged those children to be jealous of him. When the boys became men, they met often, and were cordial enough with each other; but there was no feeling of brotherhood, there never could be any.

For a twelvemonth after Mr. Cray's death, Mrs. Cray remained at the Abbey, and then she left it. It was too expensive a residence for her now — its rent swallowing up half her income. She removed with her daughters to a watering-

place in Wales, where, as she fractiously said, she hoped they should "get along." Marcus, who had qualified for a surgeon, became assistant to Dr. Davenal, and that gentleman at length gave him a small share in the profits. It was not a regularly constituted firm — "Davenal and Cray;" nothing of the sort. Hallingham knew that he was admitted a partner so far as receiving a share went; and they knew that that was all.

He was liked in Hallingham, this young doctor, and Dr. Davenal had done it in kindness, to give him a standing. As the time went on, he would have no doubt a larger and larger share — some time succeed to the whole. He was considered a suitable partner for the doctor; the Crays of the Abbey had always been looked up to in the town; and young Cray's skill as a medical man was in the ascendant. Lady Oswald was getting to like him very much, she evinced a desire to patronise him, to push forward his interests; and Dr. Davenal was really in hope that she would adopt him as her attendant for every-day calls instead of himself. Mr. Cray could spare the time for these useless visits better than Dr. Davenal. He, Mr. Cray, resided in lodgings in the town, and was growing in its favour daily in a professional point of view: not that he had displayed any unusual skill, but simply that Hallingham gave him credit for possessing it, because they liked *him*.

There was a large family of the Davenals, as there was of the Oswalds — speaking, in both cases, of the days gone by, and comprising collateral branches. Years and years ago Surgeon Davenal's had been a noted name in Hallingham; he had a large practice, and he had several children. It is not necessary to speak of all the children. Richard (the present Dr. Davenal) was the eldest son, and had succeeded to the practice. The two other sons, Walter and John, had chosen to enter the Church and both, when ordained, had gone out

to the West Indies; one of them became chaplain to the Bishop of Barbadoes, the other obtained a church in the island. Both had married there, and Caroline Davenal was the only child of Walter, the elder of the two.

Sara was twelve years old when her cousin Caroline arrived in England, an orphan; father and mother were both dead. A poor clergyman in the West Indies, dying young, was not likely to have amassed money, and the little child, Caroline, had literally nothing. Her father wrote an appealing letter to his brother Richard, on his death-bed, and Richard Davenal was not one to reject it.

“She shall be my child henceforth, and Sara’s sister,” said he, in the warmth of his heart, when the letter and the child arrived at Hallingham. And so she had been.

But it was by no means so certain that Caroline Davenal would not some time be rich. A very large sum of money was pending in her mother’s family, who were West Indians. It had become the subject of dispute, of litigation, and was at length thrown into that formidable court in England — Chancery. Should it be decided in one way, Caroline would derive no benefit; if in another, she would come in for several thousand pounds. The probabilities were in her favour — but Chancery, as you all know, is a capricious court, and does not hurry itself to inconvenience.

Upon the death of Dr. Davenal’s wife, his sister Bettina came to reside with him, and to rule his children. He had but three — Richard, Edward, and Sara. There had been others between Edward and Sara, but they died young. Fine lads, those of Dr. Davenal, although they took to plaguing stern Miss Bettina, and aggravatingly called her “Aunt Bett.” Fine young men, too, they grew up — well reared, liberally educated. Richard embraced his father’s profession; for Ed-

ward, a commission in the army was purchased, in accordance with his strong wish, and he was now Captain Davenal.

And Richard Davenal, the eldest son, where was he? Ah! it was a grievous story to look back upon. It had clouded the life of Dr. Davenal, and would cloud it to the end. Richard was dead, and Dr. Davenal blamed himself as the remote cause.

When Richard had completed his studies, and passed the College of Surgeons, he returned to Hallingham, and joined his father in practice, as it had been intended that he should. He grew greatly in favour: he promised to be as clever as his father: and Hallingham courted him. He was a man of attractive presence, of genial manners, and he mixed a great deal of pleasure with his life of work. Dr. Davenal spoke to him seriously and kindly. He said that too much pleasure did not agree long with work, could not agree with it, and he begged him to be more steady. Richard laughed, and said he would. A short while, and startling news reached the ears of Dr. Davenal — that Richard was thinking of marrying one who was undesirable. Richard, his fine boy, of whom he was so fond and proud, marry *her*? It was not against the young lady herself that so much could be urged, but against her connections. They were most objectionable. Dr. Davenal pointed out to Richard that to wed this girl would be as a blight upon his prospects, a blow to his reputation. Richard could not be brought to see it. Though not equal to themselves in position, she was respectable, he said; and her connections had nothing to do with it — he did not marry them, he married her. The feud continued; not an open feud, you understand, but an under-current of opposition, of coolness. Richard would not give up his project, and Dr. Davenal would not view it with anything but aversion. As to giving his consent, that Dr. Davenal never would; and Richard,

hitherto dutiful, was not one to go the length of marrying in defiance.

It was at this time, or a little before it, that the dispute had arisen in Barbadoes touching the money already spoken of. Particulars of it were written to Dr. Davenal by his brother John, explaining also how Caroline's interests were involved. He, the Reverend John Davenal, said in the same letter that he was anxious to send his two little boys to Europe for their education, and was waiting to find them a fit escort; he did not care to trust them alone in the ship. As Dr. Davenal read this letter, a sudden thought darted into his mind like a flash of lightning. What if he sent out Richard? Richard could sift the details about this fortune, could, if expedient, urge Caroline's interests; he could bring back the two little boys, and — and — the chief thought of all lay behind — it might break off the engagement with the young girl here, Fanny Parrack! Quite a glow of satisfaction came over Dr. Davenal's face at the thought.

He sought a conference with his son. He told him that he wished him to take a voyage to Barbadoes; that Caroline's interests required somebody to go out; that the two little boys had no friend to bring them over. Richard hesitated. To most young men a visit to the West Indies would be a welcome distraction; but Richard Davenal seemed strangely to hold back from it — to shrink from its very mention. Did some mysterious warning of what it would bring forth for him dart unconsciously across his spirit? Or did he fear that it might in some way lead to his losing the young lady upon whom he had set his heart? It cannot be known. Certain it was remembered, oh, how remembered afterwards, that an unaccountable repugnance on Richard's part did evince itself, and it was only to the persistent urgent persuasion of Dr. Davenal that he at length yielded. He yielded, as it were,

under protest, and he said he did, sacrificing his own strong wishes against it to his father's.

He set sail, and he wrote on his arrival at Barbadoes, after a fine passage; and the next letter they received, a fortnight afterwards, was not from him, but from his uncle, the clergyman. Richard had died of yellow fever.

It seemed to turn the current of Dr. Davenal's life. He blamed himself as the cause: but for his scheming — and in that moment of exaggerated feeling, of intense grief, he called it scheming — Richard, his best beloved son, would be still by his side to bless him. He had never been a scheming man, but an open and straightforward one; and never, so long as he lived, would he scheme again. In his unhappiness, he began to reproach himself for having needlessly opposed Richard's marriage — to believe that he might have done worse than in marrying Fanny Parrack. He sent for her, and he found her a pretty, modest, gentle girl, and his repentance heaped itself upon him fourfold. He informed her very kindly and considerately of the unhappy fact of Richard's death, and he told her that should any memento be found left for her amidst Richard's effects when they arrived — any letter, no matter what, it should be given to her.

But that death had changed Dr. Davenal into an old man; in the two years which had elapsed since, he had aged ten, both in looks and constitution. No wonder that a spasm of pain came over his face when Mr. Cray asked him whether he should forbid Caroline to him. You can understand his answer now: "So long as I live, I shall never 'forbid' a marriage to any over whom I hold control;" and you can understand the anguish of the tone in which it was spoken.

And that ends the chapter of retrospect.

CHAPTER VI.

Neal's Curiosity.

THEY sat around the dinner table; Dr. Davenal, Miss Bettina, Sara, and Caroline. It was an unusually silent table. Dr. Davenal could not digest the demand of Mr. Cray for Caroline; Caroline was conscious and timid; Sara scented something not altogether comfortable in the air, and did not raise her eyes from her plate; and it was one of the unusually deaf days of Miss Bettina.

Neal moved about noiselessly. Being a treasure of a servant, of course he always did move noiselessly. Quite an artistic performance was Neal's waiting; in his own person he did the waiting of three; and so tranquilly assiduous was his mode of accomplishing it, so perfect indeed were Neal's ways in the household, that Miss Bettina rarely let a day pass without sounding his praise.

Strange to say, the doctor did not like him. Why it was, or how it was, he could not tell, but he had never taken heartily to Neal. So strong was the feeling, that it may almost be said he hated Neal; and yet the man fulfilled all his duties so well that there was no fault to be found with him, no excuse invented for discharging him. The doctor's last indoor man had not been anything like so efficient a servant as Neal, was not half so fine a gentleman, had ten faults where Neal did not appear to have one. But the doctor had liked *him*, good rough honest old Giles, had kept him for many years, and only parted with him when he got too old to work. Then Neal presented himself. Neal had once lived with Lady Oswald; he had been groom of the chambers at Thorndyke in Sir John's time, and Lady Oswald kept him for a twelvemonth after Sir John's death, and nearly cried when she parted with

him; but Neal refused point-blank to go out with the carriage, and Lady Oswald did not wish to keep on three men-servants. Neal found a place in London, and they lost sight of him for some years; but he made his appearance at Lady Oswald's again one day — having come down by the new railroad to see what change it had made in the old place, and to pay his respects to my lady. My lady was gratified by the attention, and inquired what he was doing. He had left his situation, he answered, and he had some thoughts of trying for one in the country; my lady was aware, no doubt, how close and smoky London was, and he found that it had told upon his health; if he could hear of a quiet place in the country he believed he might be induced to take it, however disadvantageous it might be to him in a pecuniary point of view. Did my lady happen to know of one? My lady did happen to know of one: Dr. Davenal's, who was then parting with old Giles. She thought it would be the very place for Neal; Neal the very man for the place; and in the propensity for managing other people's business, which was as strong upon Lady Oswald as it is upon many more of us, she ordered her carriage and drove to Dr. Davenal's, and never left him until he had promised Neal the situation.

In good truth, Dr. Davenal deemed that Neal would suit him very well, provided he could bring his notions down to the place; and that, as Lady Oswald said, Neal intended to do. But to be groom of the chambers to a nobleman who kept his score or so of servants (for that was understood in the town to have been Neal's situation), and to be sole indoor man-servant to a doctor, keeping three maids only besides, and the coachman in the stables, would be a wide gulf of difference. Neal, however, accepted the place, and Dr. Davenal took him on the recommendation of Lady Oswald, without referring to the nobleman in town.

But even in the very preliminary interview when the engagement was made, Dr. Davenal felt a dislike steal over him for the man. Instinct would have prompted him to say, "You will not suit me;" reason overpowered it, and whispered, "He will prove an excellent servant;" and Dr. Davenal engaged him. That was just before Richard went out to Barbadoes, and ever since then the doctor had been saying to himself how full of prejudice was his dislike, considering the excellent servant that Neal proved to be. But he could not overget the prejudice.

Neal cleared the table when the dinner was over, and placed the dessert upon it. Dr. Davenal did not care for dessert; deemed it waste of time to sit at it; waste of eating to partake of it: but Miss Bettina, who favoured most of the customs and fashions of her girlhood, would as soon have thought of dispensing with her dinner. Dr. Davenal generally withdrew with the cloth; sometimes, if not busy, he stayed a few minutes to chat with his daughter and Caroline; but calls on his time and services were made after dinner as well as before it.

On this day he did not leave his place. He sat at the foot of the large table, Miss Davenal opposite him at its head, the young ladies between them, one on each side. Interrupted by Lady Oswald in the afternoon, he had not yet spoken to Caroline; and that he was preparing to do now.

He drew his chair near to her, and began in a low tone. Sara rose soon, and quitted the room; Miss Davenal was deaf; they were, so to say, alone.

"My dear, Mr. Cray is not the man I would have preferred to choose for you. Are you aware how very small is the income he derives from his partnership with me?"

Caroline caught up the glistening damask dessert napkin,

and began pulling out the threads of its fringe "His prospects are very fair, Uncle Richard."

"Fair enough, insomuch as that he may enjoy the whole of this practice in time. But that time may be long in coming, Caroline; twenty years hence, for all we know. - I shall be but seventy then, and my father at seventy was as good a man as I am now."

Her fingers pulled nervously at the fringe, and she did not raise her eyes. "I hope you will live much longer than that, Uncle Richard."

"So long as I live, Caroline, and retain my health and strength, so long shall I pursue my practice and take its largest share of profits. Mr. Cray understood that perfectly when I admitted him to a small share as a partner. I did it for his sake, to give him a standing. I had no intention of taking a partner; I wished only for an assistant; but out of regard to his prospects, to give him a footing, I say, I let him have a trifling share, suffered it to be known in Hallingham that he was made a partner of by Dr. Davenal. He has but two hundred a year from me."

"It does not cost much to live," said Caroline. "We need not keep many servants."

Dr. Davenal paused, feeling that she was hopelessly inexperienced.

"My dear, what do you suppose it costs us to live as we do? — here, in this house?"

"Ever so much," was Caroline's lucid answer.

"It costs me something like twelve hundred a year, Caroline, and I have no house-rent to pay."

She did not answer. Miss Davenal's sharp eyes caught sight of Caroline's damaging fingers, and she called out to know what she was doing with the dessert napkin. Caroline laid it on the table beside her plate.

"I cannot afford to increase Mr. Cray's salary very much," continued Dr. Davenal. "To reduce my own style of living I do not feel inclined, and Edward draws largely upon me. Extravagant chaps, are those young officers!" added the doctor, falling into abstraction. "There's not one of them, as I believe, makes his pay suffice."

He paused. Caroline took up a biscuit and began crumbling it on her plate.

"The very utmost that I could afford to give him would be four hundred per annum," resumed Dr. Davenal: "and I believe that I shall inconvenience myself to do this. But that's not it. There" —

"Oh, Uncle Richard, it is ample. Four hundred a year! We could not spend it."

He shook his head at the impulsive interruption; at its unconscious ignorance. "Caroline, I was going to say that the mere income is not all the question. If you marry Mr. Cray, he can make no settlement upon you; more than that, he has no home, no furniture. I think he has been precipitate; inconsiderately so: few men would ask a young lady to be their wife until they had a house to take her to; or money in hand to procure one."

Caroline's eyes filled with tears. She had hard work to keep them from dropping.

"Carine," he said, caressingly, "is it quite *irrevocable*, this attachment?"

The tears went down on the crumbled biscuit. She murmured some words which the doctor but imperfectly caught; only just sufficiently so to gather that it *was* irrevocable — or that at any rate the young lady thought so. He sighed.

"Listen to me, child. I should never attempt to oppose your inclinations; I should not think of forbidding any marriage that you had set your heart upon. If you have fixed on

Mr. Cray, or he on you — it comes to the same — I will not set my will against it. But one thing I must urge upon you both — to wait."

"Do you dislike Mr. Cray, Uncle Richard?"

"Dislike him! no, child. Have I not made him my partner? I like him personally very much. I don't know whether he has much stability," continued the doctor, in a musing tone, as though he were debating the question with himself.

"But let that pass. My objection to him for you, Caroline, is chiefly on a pecuniary score."

"I am sure we shall have enough," she answered, in a lower tone.

"If I give my consent, Carry, I shall give it under protest; and make a bargain with you at the same time."

Caroline lifted her eyes. His voice had turned to a jesting one.

"What protest? — what bargain?" she asked.

"That I give the consent in opposition to my better judgment. The bargain is, that when you find you have married imprudently and cannot make both ends meet, you don't turn round and blame me."

She bent her eyes with a smile and shook her head in answer, and began twisting the chain that lay upon her fair neck, the bracelets on her pretty arms. She wore the same rich dress that she had worn in the afternoon, as did Sara; but the high bodies had been exchanged for low ones, the custom for dinner at Dr. Davenal's.

"I will not withhold my consent. But," he added, his tone changing to the utmost seriousness, "I shall recommend you both to wait. To wait at least a year or two. You are very young, only twenty."

"I am twenty-one, Uncle Richard," she cried out. "It is Sara who is only twenty."

He smiled at the eagerness. One year seems so much to the young.

"Twenty-one, then: since last week, I believe. And Mark is three or four years older. You can well afford to wait. A year or two's time may make a wonderful difference in the position of affairs. Your share of that disputed property may have come to you, rendering a settlement upon you feasible; and Mark, if he chooses to be saving, may have got chairs and tables together. Perhaps I may increase his share at once to help him do it."

"Would you be so kind as enlighten me as to the topic of your conversation with Caroline, Dr. Davenal?"

The interruption came from Miss Bettina. Deaf as she was, it was impossible for her not to perceive that some subject of unusual moment was being discussed, and nothing annoyed her more than to fancy she was purposely kept in the dark. For the last five minutes she had sat ominously upright in her chair. Very upright she always did sit, at all times and seasons; but in moments of displeasure this stiff uprightness was unpleasantly perceptible. Dr. Davenal rose from his seat and walked towards her, bending his face a little. He had a dislike to talk to her on her very deaf days: it made him hoarse for hours afterwards.

"Caroline wants to be married, Bettina."

Miss Bettina did catch the right words this time, but she doubted it. She had not yet learnt to look upon Caroline as aught but a child. Could the world have gone round in accordance with the ideas of Miss Bettina, nobody with any regard to propriety would have married in it until the age of thirty was past. Her cold grey eyes and her mouth gradually opened as she looked from her brother to her niece, from her niece to her brother.

"Wants to be what, did you say?"

"To be married, Aunt Bett," cried out the doctor. "It's the fashion, it seems, with the young folks now-a-days! You were not in so great a hurry when you were young."

The doctor spoke in no covert spirit of joking — as a stranger might have supposed, Miss Davenal being Miss Davenal still. Bettina Davenal had had her romance in life. In her young days, when she was not much older than Caroline, a poor curate had sought to make her his wife. She was greatly attached to him, but he was very, very poor, and prudence said, "Wait until better times shall come for him." Miss Bettina's father and mother were alive then; the latter a great invalid, and that also weighed with her, for in her duty and affection she did not like to leave her home. Ay, cold and unsympathising as she appeared to be now, Bettina Davenal had once been a warm, loving girl, an affectionate daughter. And so, by her own fiat, she waited and waited, and in her thirtieth year that poor curate, never promoted to be a richer one, had died — had died of bad air, and hard work, and poor nourishment. His duties were cast in the midst of one of our worst metropolitan localities; and they were heavy, and his stipend was small. From that time Bettina Davenal's disposition had changed; she grew cold, formal, hard: repentance, it was suspected, was ever upon her, that she had not risked the prudence and saved his life. Her own fortune, added to what he earned, would at least have kept him from the ills of poverty.

"Who wants to marry her?" questioned Miss Davenal, when she could take her condemning eyes away from Caroline.

"Mark Cray."

The words seemed to mollify Miss Davenal in a slight degree, and her head relaxed a very little from its uprightness. "She might do worse, Richard. He is a good man, and

I dare say he is making money. Those civil engineers get on well."

"I said *Mark Cray*, Aunt Bett," repeated the doctor.

"Mark! *He* won't do. He is only a boy. He has got neither house nor money."

"Just what I say," said the doctor. "I tell her they must wait."

"Mad! to be sure they must be mad, both of them," complaisantly acquiesced Miss Davenal.

"Wait, I said, Bettina," roared the doctor.

"You need not rave at me, Richard. I am not as deaf as a post. Who says anything about 'fate?' Fate, indeed! don't talk of fate to me. Where's your common sense gone?"

"Wait, I said, Aunt Bett! Wa-a-a-it! I tell them they must wait."

"No," said Aunt Bett. "Better break it off."

"I don't think they will," returned the doctor.

Miss Bettina turned her eyes on Caroline. That young lady, left to herself, had pretty nearly done for the damask napkin. She dreaded but one person in the world, and that was stern Aunt Bettina. Miss Bettina rose in her slow stately fashion, and turned Caroline's drooping face towards her.

"What in the world has put it into your head to think of *Mark Cray*?"

"I didn't think of him before he thought of me," was poor Caroline's excuse, which, as a matter of course, Miss Davenal did not catch.

"Has it ever occurred to you to reflect, Caroline, how very serious a step is that of settlement in life?"

"We shall get along, Aunt Bettina."

"I'll not get along," exclaimed Miss Bettina, her face darkening. "I attempt to say a little word to you for your

good, for your own interest, and you tell me to 'get along!' How dare you, Caroline Davenal?"

"Oh, Aunt Bettina! I said we should get along."

"I don't know that you would get along if you married Mark Cray. I don't like Mark Cray. I did not think" —

"Why don't you like him, aunt?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Bettina. "He is too light and careless. I did not think it a wise step of your uncle's to take him into partnership; but it was not my province to interfere. The Crays brought it to nothing, you know. Lived like princes for a few years, and when affairs came to be looked into on Mr. Cray's death, the money was gone."

"That was not Mark's fault," returned Caroline, indignantly. "It ought to be no reason for your disliking *him*, Aunt Bettina."

"It gives one prejudices, you see. He may be bringing it to the same in his own case before his life's over."

"You might as well say the same of Oswald," resentfully spoke Caroline.

"No; Oswald's different. He is worth a thousand of Mark. Don't think of Mark, Caroline. You might do so much better: better in all ways."

"I don't care to do better," was the rebellious answer. And then, half-frightened at it, repenting of its insolence, poor Caroline burst into tears. She felt very indignant at the disparagement of Mark. Fortunately for her, Miss Davenal mistook the words.

"We don't care that you should do better! Of course we care. What are you thinking of, child? Your uncle studies your interests as much as he would study Sara's."

"More!" impulsively interrupted the doctor, who was pacing the room, his hands under his coat-tails. "I might feel less scrupulous in opposing Sara's inclination."

“You hear, Caroline! The doctor opposes this inclination of yours!”

Caroline cast a look to him, a sort of helpless appeal: not only that he would *not* oppose it, but that he would set right Miss Davenal.

“I don’t oppose it, Bettina: I don’t go so far as that. I recommend them to wait. In a year or two” —

A loud knock at the hall-door startled Dr. Davenal. Knocks there were pretty frequent — loud ones too; but this was loud and long as a peal of thunder. And it startled somebody besides the doctor.

CHAPTER VII.

An Interruption.

THAT somebody was Neal. Neal’s mind was by far too composed a one to be ruffled by any sort of shock, and Neal’s nerves were in first-rate order. It happened, however, that Neal was rather unpleasantly near to the front door at that moment, and the sudden sound, so sharp and long, did make him start.

When Neal removed the dinner things, he placed his plate and glasses in the pantry, and carried the tray with the other articles down to the kitchen. In going up-stairs again he was called to by Watton the upper woman-servant of the family, who was as old as Neal himself, and had lived with them for some years. She was in the apartment opening from the kitchen, a boarded room with a piece of square carpet in the middle; it was called the housekeeper’s room, and was used as a sitting room by the servants when their kitchen work was over for the day. The servant’s entrance to the house was on this lower floor; steps ascending from it to the outer door in the back garden.

"Did you call me?" asked Neal, looking in.

Watton had her hands busy papering some jars of jam. She turned round at the question, displaying a sallow face with quick dark eyes, and pointed with her elbow to a note lying on the table before her.

"A note for Miss Sara, Neal. It came five minutes ago."

"Jessy might have brought it up," remarked Neal. "Letters should never be delayed below."

"Jessy has stepped out," explained Watton. "And I want to get to an end with this jam; Miss Bettina expected it was done and put away this morning."

Neal carried the note up-stairs to his pantry, and there examined it. But beyond the fact that it was superscribed "Miss Sara Davenal," Neal could gather no information to gratify his curiosity. The handwriting was not familiar to him; the envelope displayed neither crest nor coat-of-arms. He held it up, but not the most scrutinising eye could detect anything through it; he gingerly tried the fastening of the envelope, but it would not come apart without violence. As he was thus engaged, he heard the dining-room door open, and he peeped out of his pantry.

It was Miss Sara. She was going up-stairs to the drawing-room. Neal heard her enter it; and after the lapse of a minute or two, he followed her, bearing the note on a silver waiter. She had shut herself in. Somehow that conference in the dining-room was making her nervous.

"Who brought it, Neal?" she carelessly asked, taking the note from the waiter.

"I am unable to say, miss. It came when I was waiting at dinner."

Neal retired, closed the drawing-room door, and descended to his pantry. There he began making preparations for washing his dinner glasses, rather noisy ones for Neal. He put

some water into a wooden bowl, rinsed the glasses in it, and turned them down to dry. Having advanced thus far, it probably struck Neal that a trifling interlude of recreation might be acceptable.

He stole cautiously along as far as the dining-room door, and there came to a halt, bending down his head and ear. Neal could calculate his chances as well as any living spy. He could not be disturbed unawares by Miss Sara from the drawing-room or the servants from the kitchen; and his sense of hearing was so acute, partly by nature, partly by exercise, that no one could approach to open the dining-room door from the inside, without his getting ample warning. Neal had not played his favourite part for long years to be discovered at last.

There he had remained, listening to anything in the dining-room there might be to hear, until aroused by that strange knock; so loud, long, and near, that it startled even him. A noiseless glide back to his pantry, a slight clatter there with spoons and forks, and Neal came forth to answer the summons, with a far fleeter foot than Neal in general allowed his stately self to put forth, for the knocker had begun again and was knocking perpetually.

"Is all the town dying?" muttered Neal.

He pulled open the door, and there burst in two fine lads, sending their ringing shout of laughter through the house, and nearly upsetting the man in their wild haste, as they sprang past him into the dining-room, and on Dr. Davenal. Sara alarmed at the unusual noise, came running down.

"You rogues!" exclaimed the doctor. "What brings you here to-day?"

They were too excited to explain very lucidly. One day extra in a schoolboy's holidays, especially at the commencement, will turn young heads crazy. The usher who was to

take charge of such of the boys whose homes lay this way, had received news that morning of the illness of a relative, and had to leave a day sooner: so they left also.

"Nothing loth, I'll answer for it," cried Dr. Davenal; and the boys laughed.

He placed them both before him, and looked first at one, then at the other, regarding what alteration six months had made. There was a general likeness between them, as regarded eyes, hair, and complexion, but none in features. Richard, the eldest, generally called Dick, was a good-tempered, saucy-looking boy, with a turned-up nose; Leopold had more delicate features, and seemed less strong.

"You have both grown," said the doctor; "but Leo's thin. How do your studies get on, Dick?"

"Oh — middling," acknowledged Dick, a remarkably candid lad. "Uncle Richard, I'm the best cricketer in the whole school. There's not one of the fellows can come up to me."

"The best what, Richard?" said Miss Bettina, bending her ear to the lad.

"Cricketer, Aunt Bett," repeated Richard.

"Good boy! good boy!" said Miss Bettina approvingly. "Resolve to be the best scholar always, and you *will* be the best. You shall have a pot of fresh jam for tea, Dick."

Dick smothered his laughter. "I am not a good scholar at all, Aunt Bett. Leo is: but he's a muff at cricket."

"Not a good scholar!" repeated Miss Bettina, catching those words correctly. "Did you not tell me you were the best scholar?"

"No. I said I was the best cricketer," responded Dick.

"Oh," said Miss Bettina, her face resuming its severity. "That will do you no good, Richard."

"Aren't you deafer than before, Aunt Bett?"

"Am I what?" asked Miss Bettina. "*Darker!* I never was dark yet. Not one of all the Davenal family had a skin as fair as mine. What put that fancy into your head, Master Richard?"

"I said deafer, Aunt Bett," repeated Richard. "I am sure you are just as deaf again as you were at Christmas! Uncle Richard, we had a boat race yesterday. I was second oar."

"I don't like those boat races," hastily interrupted Caroline.

"Girls never do," said Mr. Richard, loftily. "As if they'd like to blister their hands with the oars! Look at mine."

He extended his right hand, palm upwards, triumphant in blisters. Dr. Davenal spoke.

"I don't like boat racing for you boys, either, Dick."

"Oh, it was prime, Uncle Richard! One of the boats tipped over, and the fellows got a ducking."

"That's just it," said Dr. Davenal. "Boats 'tip' over when you inexperienced young gentlemen least expect it. It has led to loss of life sometimes, Dick."

"Any muff can scramble out of the water, Uncle Richard. Some of us fellows can swim like an otter."

"And some can't swim at all, I suppose. What did Dr. Keen say when he heard of the boatful going over?"

Richard Davenal raised his honest, wide-open eyes to his uncle, some surprise in their depths. "It didn't get to Keen's ears, Uncle Richard! He knew nothing of the boat race; we had it out of bounds. As if Keen wouldn't have stopped it for us, if he had known. He thought we were off to the cricket-field."

"Well, you must be a nice lot of boys!" cried Dr. Davenal, quaintly. "Does he give a prize for honour? You'd get it, Dick, if he did."

Dick laughed. "It's the same at all schools, Uncle Richard. If we let the masters into the secret of all our fun, mighty little of it should we get."

"I think they ought to be let into the fun that consists in going on the water. There's danger in that."

"Not a bit of it, Uncle Richard. It was the jolliest splash! The chief trouble was getting the dry things to put on. They had been laid up in the boxes ready to come home with us, and we had to put out no end of stratagem to get at them."

"A jolly splash, was it! Were you one of the immersed ones, Dick?"

"Not I," returned Dick, throwing back his head. "As if we second-desk fellows couldn't manage a boat better than that! Leo was."

"How many of you were drowned, Leo?"

Leo opened his eyes as wide as Dick had previously done. "*Drowned*, Uncle Richard! Not one. We scrambled out as easy as fun. There's no fear of our getting drowned."

"No fear at all, as it seems to me," returned the doctor. "But there's danger of it, Leo."

Leo made no reply. Perhaps he scarcely defined the distinction of the words. Dr. Davenal remained silent for a minute, lost in thought; then he sat down, and held the two lads in front of him.

"Did either of you ever observe a white house, lying back on a hill, just as you pass the next station to this — Hildon?"

"I know it," cried out Richard. "It is old Low's."

"Old Low's, if you choose to call him so, but he is not as old as I am, Master Dick. Some people in that neighbourhood called him Squire Low. He is Lady Oswald's landlord. A few years ago, boys, I was sent for to his house; that very

house upon the hill. Mr. Low's mother was living with him then, and I found she was taken ill. I went for several days in succession: sometimes I saw Mr. Low's sons, three nice lads, but daring as you two are, and about your present age. One afternoon, — listen, both of you, — I had no sooner got home from Mr. Low's, than I was surprised to see one of his men riding up here at a fierce rate. The railway was not opened then. I feared old Mrs. Low might be worse, and I hastened out to the man myself. He had come galloping all the way, and he asked me to gallop back as quickly" —

"Old Mrs. Low was dead!" cried quick Dick.

"No, sir, she was not dead. She was no worse than when I left her. Mr. Low's three sons had done just what you tell me you did yesterday. They went upon the river at Hildon in a rowing-boat, and the boat upset — tipped over, as you call it; and the poor boys had not found it so easy to scramble out as you, Leo, and your comrades did. One of them was out, the man said; he thought the other two were not. So I mounted my own horse and hastened over."

"But what did they want with you, Uncle Richard? Were there no doctors near?"

"Yes. When I got there a doctor was over the lad: but Mr. Low had confidence in me, and in his distress he sent for me. It was the youngest who was saved — James."

"What! James Low, who goes about in that hand-chair?"

"The very same, Dick. From that hour he has never had the proper use of his limbs. A species of rheumatic affection — we call it so for want of a better name — is upon him perpetually. When the illness and fever that supervened upon the accident were over, and which lasted some weeks, we found his strength did not return to him, and he has re-

mained a confirmed invalid. And that was the result of one of those tips over, which you deem so harmless."

"Will he never get well?" asked Leo.

"Never, I fear."

"And the two other boys, Uncle Richard? Did they scramble out at last?"

"No, Leo. They were drowned."

Leo remained silent; Dick also. Dr. Davenal resumed.

"Yes, they were drowned. I stood in the room where the coffins rested, side by side, the day before the funeral, Mr. Low with me. He told me how generally obedient his poor boys were, save in that one particular, the going upon the water. He had had some contentions with them upon the point; he had a great dislike to the water for them — a dread of their venturing on it, for the river at Hildon is dangerous, and the boys were inexperienced. But they were daring-spirited boys who could see no danger in it, and — listen, Dick! — did not believe there was any. And they thought they'd just risk it for once, and they did so; and this was the result. I shall never forget their father's sobs as he told me this over the poor cold faces in the coffins."

The young Davenals had grown sober.

"My lads, I have told you this little incident — but I think you must have heard somewhat of it before, for it is known to all Hallingham just as well as it is to me — to prove to you that there is danger connected with the water, more particularly for inexperienced boys. Where does the school get the boats?"

"We hire them," answered Dick. "There's a boat association in the place; poor men who keep boats, and hire them out to anybody who'll pay."

"They should be forbidden to hire them to school-boys of your age. I think I shall drop a hint to Dr. Keen."

Dick Davenal grew frightened. "For goodness sake don't do that, Uncle Richard! If the school knew it got to Keen through you, they'd send me and Leo to Coventry."

"I'll take care you don't get sent to Coventry through me, Dick. But I cannot let you run the liability of this danger."

"I don't think I'll go on the water again at school, Uncle Richard," said Leo, who had sat down, and was nursing his leg thoughtfully.

"I don't much think you will," said the doctor.

Leo continued to nurse his leg. Dick, who had little thought about him, had thrown his arms around Sara's waist, and was whispering to her. Both the lads loved Sara. When they had arrived little strangers from the West Indies, new to the doctor's house and its inmates, new to everything else, they had taken wonderfully to Sara, and she to them. You do not need to be told that they were the lads whom poor Richard Davenal was to have escorted over; and when they came they brought his effects with them.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Tacit Bargain.

MEANWHILE Mr. Oswald Cray had dined at his rustic inn, the Apple Tree, and was on his way to pay an evening visit at Dr. Davenal's. In passing along New Street, he encountered his half-brother, turning hastily out of his lodgings.

"Were you coming in, Oswald?" asked Marcus, as they shook hands. "I heard you were down."

"Not now," replied Oswald. "I am going on to Dr. Davenal's, and I go up again by the night train. My visit

here to-day was to Lady Oswald. We are going to take a strip of her grounds for sheds, and she does not like it."

"Not like it!" echoed Mark. "It's worse than that. You should have seen the way she was in this afternoon. It won't hurt the grounds."

"Not at all. But she cannot be brought to see that it will not. In point of fact, the sound of it is worse than the reality will be. It does sound ill, I confess, — railway-sheds upon one's grounds! I was in hopes of being the first to break the news to her: so much lies in the telling of a thing; in the impression first imparted."

"She said this afternoon that it all lay with you. That you could spare her grounds if you would."

"I wish it did lie with me: I would do my best to find another spot and spare them. The company have fixed upon the site, Low has given his concurrence, and there's no more to be said or done. I am very sorry, but it has been no doing of mine. Will you go with me to the doctor's, Mark?"

Marcus hesitated, and then said he had rather not call that evening.

"Why?" asked Oswald.

"Well — the fact is, — I don't see why I may not tell you, — I have been asking the doctor this afternoon for Caroline. He did not give me a positive answer, one way or the other; and I don't think it will look well to press a visit upon them just now."

Oswald Cray's was not a demonstrative countenance: a self-controlled man's rarely is: but certainly it exhibited marked surprise now, and he gazed at his brother inquiringly.

"You are surely not thinking of marrying?"

"Yes, I am. Why should I not think of it?"

"But what have you to marry upon? What means?"

"Oh — I must get Dr. Davenal to increase my share. By

a word he dropped this afternoon when we were talking of it, I fancy he would do it; would increase it to four hundred a year. We might manage upon that."

Oswald Cray made no immediate reply. He, the self-reliant man, would have felt both pain and shame at the very thought of marrying upon the help of others.

"You are thinking it's not enough, Oswald?"

"It might be enough for prudent people. But I don't think it would be found enough by you and Caroline Davenal. Mark, I fancy — I shall not offend you? — I fancy you are not of a prudent turn."

"I don't know that I am. But any man can be prudent when there's a necessity that he should be."

"It has not always proved so."

"I see you think me a spendthrift," said Mark, good-humouredly.

"Not exactly that. I think you could not live upon as small an income as some can. Dr. Davenal gives you, I believe, two hundred a year, and you have been with him six months: my opinion is, Mark, that at the twelvemonth's end you will find the two hundred has nothing like kept you. You will be looking about for another hundred to pay debts."

"Are you so particularly saving yourself?" retorted Mark.

"That is not the question, Mark; I am not going to be married," answered Oswald, with a smile. "But I do save."

"If the doctor will give me four hundred a year to begin with, there's no need to wait."

"You have no furniture."

"That's easily ordered," said Mark.

"Very easily indeed," laughed Oswald. "But there'll be the paying for it."

"It won't take so much. We shall not set up in a grand way. We can pay by instalments."

"A bad beginning, Mark."

Mark rather winced. "Are you going to turn against me, Oswald? To throw cold water on it?"

Oswald Cray looked very grave as he answered. Mark was not his own brother, and he could not urge him too much; but a conviction seated itself in his heart, perhaps not for the first time, that Mark had inherited their father's imprudence.

"These considerations are for you, Mark; not for me. If I speak of them to you, I do so only in your true interest. We have never been brothers, therefore I do not presume to give a brother's counsel, — you would deem I had no right to do it. Only be prudent, for your own sake and Caroline's. Good evening, if you will go back."

Neal admitted Mr. Oswald Cray, and Neal's face lighted up with the most apparent genuine pleasure at doing it. Neal was the quintessence of courteous respect to his betters, but an additional respect would show itself in his manner to Mr. Oswald Cray, from the fact possibly that he had served in the Oswald family at Thorndyke, and Mr. Oswald Cray was so near a connection of it.

Dr. Davenal was then in the garden-parlour with Sara. The noisy boys were regaling themselves with good things in the dining-room, under the presidentship of Miss Bettina. A few moments, and the doctor and Mr. Oswald Cray were deep in the discussion of the proposition that had so moved them; the doctor being the first to speak of it. Sara sat near the window, doing some light work. A fair picture she looked, in her evening dress; her cheeks somewhat flushed, her neck so fair and white, the gold chain lying on it; her pretty arms partially hidden by their white lace. Dr. Davenal stood in a musing attitude on the other side of the window, and Mr. Os-

wald Cray sat between them, a little back, his elbow on the centre table, his chin on his hand.

"Mark has just told me of it," he observed, in reply to Dr. Davenal. "I met him as I walked here. I was very much surprised."

"Not more surprised than I," returned the doctor.

"At least, surprised that he should have spoken to you so soon."

"What do you think of it?" asked the doctor, abruptly.

"Nay, sir, it is for you to think," was the reply of Oswald Cray, after a momentary pause.

"I know — in that sense. My opinion is, that it is exceedingly premature."

"Well — yes, I confess it appears so to me. I told Mark so. There's one thing, Dr. Davenal — some men get on all the better for marrying early."

"True: and some all the better for waiting. I like those men who have the courage and patience to wait, bearing steadily on to the right moment and working for it. I married very early in life myself, but my circumstances justified it. Where circumstances do not justify it, a man should wait. I don't mean waiting on to an unreasonable time, until the sear and yellow leaf's advancing; nothing of that: but there's a medium in all things. I am sure you would not rush into an imprudent marriage: you'd wait your time."

A smile parted Oswald Cray's lips. "I am obliged to wait, sir."

"That is, prudence obliges you?"

"Yes; that's it."

"And I make no doubt your income is a good deal larger than the present one of Mark?"

"I believe it is."

Dr. Davenal stood in silence, twirling his watch chain.

"Give me your advice," he said, turning to Mr. Oswald Cray.

"Dr. Davenal, may I tell you that I would prefer not to give it? By blood Mark is my half-brother; but you know the circumstances under which we were reared — that we are, in actual fact, little more than strangers; and I feel the greatest delicacy in interfering with him in any way. I will do him any good that I can: but I will not give advice regarding him in so momentous a step as this."

Dr. Davenal understood the feeling, it was a perfectly proper one. "Do you think he has much stability? — enough to steer him safely through life, clear of shoals and quicksands?"

Oswald Cray's opinion was that Mark possessed none. But he was not sure: he had had so little to do with him. "Indeed, I cannot speak with certainty," was his answer. "Mark is far more of a stranger to me than he is to you. Stability sometimes comes with years only; with time and experience."

"I cannot tell you how surprised I was," resumed the doctor, after a pause. "Had Mark come and proposed to marry Bettina, I could not have been more astonished. The fact is, I had somehow got upon the wrong scent."

"The wrong scent?" exclaimed Mr. Oswald Cray, looking up.

"I don't mind telling you, considering how different, as it has turned out, was the actual state of things," said Dr. Davenal, with a laugh. "I fancied you were inclined to like Caroline."

Mr. Oswald Cray's deep-set blue eyes were opened wider than usual in his astonishment. "What caused you to fancy that?"

"Upon my word I don't know. Looking back, I think

how foolish I must have been. But you see, that idea tended to obscure my view, as to Mark."

Oswald Cray rose from his seat, and stood by Dr. Davenal, looking from the window.

"Had it been so, would you have objected to me?" he asked; and in his voice, jesting though it was, there rang a sound of deep meaning.

"No, I would not," replied Dr. Davenal. "I wish it had been so. Don't talk of it; it will put me out of conceit of Mark."

Mr. Oswald Cray laughed, and stole a glance at Sara. Her cheeks were crimson; her head was bent closer to her work than it need have been.

At that moment Dr. Davenal's carriage was heard coming up the side lane, Roger's head and shoulders just visible over the garden wall. Dr. Davenal gave the man a nod as he passed, as much as to say he should be out immediately, and retreated into the room. It had broken the thread of the discourse.

"You came down in answer to Lady Oswald's message," he observed. "She said she had sent for you."

"Not in answer to the message. I came away before it reached London: at any rate before it reached me."

"Lady Oswald's in a fine way. I suppose nothing can be done?"

"Nothing at all. It is unfortunate that her grounds abut just on that part of the line."

"She will never stop in the house."

"You see, the worst is, that she has just entered upon the third term of her lease. She took it for seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years. I am not sure, however, that Mr. Low, under the circumstances, could oppose her depart—"

"Uncle Richard, the carriage is come round to the door. How are you, Mr. Oswald Cray?"

The interruption came from the boys. Both had rushed in without any regard to noise; or rather to the avoidance of it. Mr. Oswald Cray shook hands with them, and the doctor turned to shake hands with *him*.

"I have to see a patient or two to-night. A poor country-woman's son is ill, and I promised her to go over this evening if possible. Perhaps you'll be here when I return. Bettina and the girls will give you some tea."

He hurried out; and the boys after him, clamourously enough. During their holidays, Dr. Davenal could rarely get into his carriage without those two dancing attendance round it, like a bodyguard of jumping savages. Mr. Oswald Cray turned to Sara, who had risen also, and stood before her.

"Just one moment, Sara, for a single question. Did *you* fall into the misapprehension that I was growing attached to your cousin?"

Her manner grew shrinkingly timid; her eyelashes were never raised from her hot cheeks. It seemed that she would have spoken, for her lips parted; but there came no sound from them.

"Nay, but you must answer me," he rejoined, some agitation distinguishable in his tone. "Did you do me the injustice to suppose I had any thought of Caroline?"

"No. O no."

He drew a deep breath, as if the words relieved him, took her hand in his, and laid his other hand upon it, very seriously.

"It was well to ask: but I did not think you could so have mistaken me. Sara! I am not an imprudent man, as I fear Mark is; I could not, in justice to the woman whom I wish to make my wife, ask her to leave her home of comfort until I

can surround her with one somewhat equivalent to it. I think — I hope — that another year may accomplish this. Meanwhile — you will not misunderstand me, or the motives of my silence?”

She lifted her eyes to his face to speak: they were swimming in tears: lifted them in her earnestness.

“I shall never misunderstand you, Oswald.”

And Mr. Oswald Cray, for the first time in his life, bent his lips on hers to seal the tacit bargain.

CHAPTER IX.

Edward Davenal.

It was a charming evening in the month of October. The heat of summer was over, the cool calm autumn reigned in all its loveliness. Never had the sun set more brilliantly than it was setting now; never did it give token of a finer day for the morrow; and that morrow was to be Caroline Davenal's wedding-day.

Persuasion and promises had proved stronger than Dr. Davenal and prudence, and he had consented to the early marriage, it may be said reluctantly. He had urged upon them the verb to wait: but neither of them appeared inclined to conjugate it: Caroline especially, strange as it may seem to have to say it, had turned a deaf ear. So the doctor had yielded, and the plans and projects for carrying the wedding out were set on foot.

Dr. Davenal had behaved generously. He increased Mark Cray's share to four hundred a year, and he gave them a cheque for three hundred pounds for furniture. “You must be content to have things at the beginning in a plain way, if you must be in a hurry,” he said to them; “when you get on you can add costly furniture by degrees.” Miss Bettina would

not give anything. Not a penny-piece. "No," she said to Caroline, "you are flying in the face of wiser heads than yours, and I will not encourage it. If you don't mind, you'll come to grief."

Caroline laughed at the "coming to grief." Perhaps not without cause. Were they but commonly prudent there would be little fear of it. Four hundred a year to begin upon, and a great deal more in prospective, was what many and many a couple beginning life might have envied. Even Dr. Davenal began to think he had been over cautious. It might have been better to wait a year or two, but they would do well as it was, if they chose. If they chose! it all lay in that. Perhaps what made people think of imprudence in their case was, that both had been reared to enjoy a much larger income.

Those prudential fears and scruples were over, however; they belonged to the past; nobody retained them in the actual face of preparation. When Mark Cray was looking out for a house, the abbey, yet untenanted, occurred to him. It had been his father's residence; it carried a certain weight of position with it; and he thought it would be well that it should be his. Dr. Davenal acquiesced: it was certainly rather farther from his own residence than was convenient; and it was at the opposite end of the town; but that fact might have its advantages as well as its disadvantages: and Mark took the abbey at a yearly rental.

How busy they had been, furnishing it and getting the wedding clothes ready, they alone could tell! In this bustle, in the satisfaction of buying the new furniture, and settling it in its appointed places, the old prudent objections, I say, were lost sight of; completely forgotten. Miss Bettina thawed so far as to go down two whole days to the abbey, and superintend; and she read Caroline lessons on domestic management and economy from morning until night.

Oswald Cray had delicately placed a fifty-pound note in his brother's hands. "Present-giving at these times seems to be the order of the day, Mark," he carelessly said. "If you and Caroline will choose something for yourselves, and save me the trouble, I shall be glad. You know more about dressing-cases and work-boxes than I do." Altogether, the abbey, — what with the purchased furniture, and a few pretty things that went down out of Dr. Davenal's house, — was quite sufficiently well set up.

And now it was the evening preceding the wedding, and the house was in a commotion of preparation. Servants were running hither and thither; Miss Bettina, with her sharp voice and her deaf ears, was everywhere, creating no end of mistakes; the breakfast-table was being laid out; Sara was quietly helping Jessy to pack her cousin's travelling trunk; and Caroline, useless as usual, was going into ecstasies over a present which had just come in.

It was from Lady Oswald. A handsome tea and coffee-pot with their stands, sugar basin and cream jug, all of solid silver. Caroline ran round the house to get admirers to view it, and ran into the room of Dr. Davenal.

Neal was coming out as she entered, a waiter in his hand, therefore it was evident he had been bearing something to his master. Dr. Davenal stood before the window looking at an unopened note.

"O uncle, do come and see! It is the best present I have had: a silver tea-service. I did not expect anything like it from Lady Oswald."

"Presently, child. All in good time."

He laid down the note on the table, as he spoke, not having opened it. Caroline thought his tone and countenance were alike sad.

"Has anything vexed you, Uncle Richard?"

"A little, Carine. When one waits for the sight of a dear face, and the hours go by in expectation, hour after hour, from the opening of the day to its close, the disappointment brings a chill."

Caroline wondered. She did not understand that longing waiting yet. "Do you allude to Edward, Uncle Richard?"

Whom else should he allude to? Since Richard's death, Edward Davenal had grown dearer than ever son did to father. Dr. Davenal could willingly have laid down his life for him, and thought it no sacrifice. Ah! if these sons and daughters could but realise this precious love that is lavished on them in all its strange intensity!

"Aunt Bettina's vexed that he is not here. She says it will be putting the dinner off."

"We are too impatient, Caroline. I daresay he could not get here sooner. Here's Mark," added the doctor.

Dr. Davenal's carriage was drawing up to the gate. The doctor had despatched Mark in it that afternoon to see a country patient: he waited at home for his son. Roger looked to the house as Mr. Cray got out, wondering whether the carriage was wanted again, or whether he might drive it round to the coach-house. Dr. Davenal raised his hand by way of signal, and was hastening out.

"*Won't* you come and see my tea-pot and things, Uncle Richard?" cried Caroline, piteously.

"When I come back, Carine. The tea-pot can wait."

"And there's that note on the table," she said, resenting the slight on the tea-pot. "You have never opened it."

"That can wait too. I know what it is."

The doctor walked quickly on, and Caroline followed him to the front door. Mark was coming in.

"Is the London train in, Mark? — did you notice as you came by? There's one due."

"I did not notice," replied Mark. "I don't much think it is in. I saw no bustle."

Dr. Davenal stepped into the carriage. "Turn round, Roger. The railway station."

The whistle was sounding as they drew near, and Roger whipped up his steeds. The doctor stepped on to the platform as the train dashed in. He elbowed his way amidst the crowd, trying to peer into every first-class carriage.

"Edward!"

"My dear father!"

Captain Davenal leaped lightly out — an upright, slender man, with the unmistakable look of the soldier; a dark, handsome face, and a free and ready voice.

"I have been looking for you all day, Ned."

"Not up here, surely?"

Dr. Davenal laughed. "Not likely. I just happened to come up now; so it's all right. You have some luggage, I suppose?"

"A portmanteau. My servant's here."

"Good evening, Dr. Davenal. Ah, captain! how are you?"

The salutation came from a passenger who had likewise stepped out of a first-class compartment. They turned to behold Oswald Cray.

"Why! you don't mean to say that you have come by this train?" cried Captain Davenal, in his quick manner.

"Yes I have. And you?"

"I have come by it, too. Where were our eyes, I wonder?"

"In our own compartment, I expect," said Oswald Cray. "I was at the end of the train, and did not get out during the journey."

"Neither did I. The same errand brings us, I suppose — Caroline's wedding? It's fine to be Mark Cray! You and I

must wait for our honours: we can't afford these grand doings yet."

Dr. Davenal looked at his son. "If you can't afford them now, Ned, when are you to afford them?"

Captain Davenal's answer was to shrug his shoulders. "There may come in a great rich ship some day," he said, with his ready laugh. "Are you going that way, Mr. Oswald Cray? We shall see you by and by."

All the pride and affection of the father shone out in Dr. Davenal's face as he passed through the town, sitting by the side of his brave son, who was in Roger's place, and drove. A hundred hats were taken off; a hundred pleased faces greeted them. The doctor remained passive, save for smiles; but Captain Davenal's gay face was turned from side to side, in answer to the salutations, and he had something else to do besides attending to his horses.

"Take care, Ned."

"All right, sir," was the young officer's careless answer. But he escaped the wheel of a meeting carriage by only half an inch; and Roger, seated behind, said to himself that the captain had not yet grown out of his randomness.

He pulled the horses up with a jerk when they arrived, leaped out, and turned to give his hand to his father. Neal had the door open, and Edward Davenal passed him with a nod and a fleet foot, for he saw his sister's face behind, bright with joyous tears. He kissed them away.

"Sara, you foolish child! Keep the tears until I go again."

"When will that be, Edward?"

"To-morrow evening. Hush!" he whispered, checking her startled exclamation. "Let me take my own time for telling papa. I know he will be vexed."

"We thought you would stay a week at least."

"I wish I could! Leave is difficult to get at all just now, on account of —— I'll tell you more later, Sara."

Miss Bettina Davenal was at hand, waiting for her greeting. In the old days of his boyhood, she and he were undisguised enemies. The boy was high-spirited and rude to her, ten times worse than poor Richard: he had been the first to call her Aunt Bett, and to persist in it, in spite of her angry displeasure. He called it her still.

"Well, Aunt Bett! You are looking younger than ever."

"Are you quite well, Nephew Edward?"

"In high feather, aunt. And mean to keep so until the wedding's over. When is yours to be, Aunt Bett?"

"To-morrow at eleven," was Aunt Bett's unconscious answer. "And right glad I shall be when it has taken place."

The shout of laughter vexed Miss Davenal; she wondered what the mistake was. But the captain turned away, for Caroline was stealing towards them with conscious cheeks, and the new silver tea-pot in her hand.

"It was unkind of you not to come before, Edward," she said. "Some of my beautiful new dresses are packed up now, and you can't see them."

"I shan't die of the disappointment, Carry," was the ungallant rejoinder of the captain. "What's that you are carrying? A trophy?"

"It's a tea-pot. It is part of Lady Oswald's present. Hers is the best of all, and I have had so many. Come and look at them: they are laid out in the garden-room."

"So many tea-pots?" inquired the captain.

"Nonsense, Edward! You know I meant presents."

He drew something covertly from his pocket, and clasped it on her neck. It was a dazzling necklace. Caroline, loving ornaments excessively, was wild with delight.

"O Edward! how kind you are! I never liked you as much as I do now."

"Candid!" cried the captain: and Dr. Davenal laughed outright as he walked away to his consulting-room.

His son followed him. The doctor had taken up the note which he had left on the table, and was about to open it when something strange in its appearance struck upon his eye. He carried it to the window and looked minutely at its fastening, at the claret-coloured crest stamped in the envelope, that of the Oswald family.

"Edward," said he, "does it look to you as if this envelope had been tampered with — opened, in fact?"

Captain Davenal examined the fastening. It was quite daylight still, though less bright than before the sun went down. "There's not a doubt of it, in my opinion," he said, handing the note back to his father.

"It's very strange," exclaimed the doctor. "Do you know, it has occurred to me lately to think that two or three of my letters have been opened."

"By their appearance?"

"By their appearance. But I could not be certain how or when it was done. For aught I know, they might have been reopened by their writers before forwarding them to me. I do feel, however, sure that this one has been tampered with since it lay here. It came by the same messenger that brought Caroline's present, and Neal brought it in to me. I was deep in thought at the time, and I turned it about in my fingers, looking at it, but not opening it. I knew what its contents were — that they concerned a little matter Lady Oswald had to write to me upon — and I did not open it, but went to the station, leaving it on the table. Now I am fully certain that that appearance of reopening was not on it then."

"Who can have opened it, then?" quickly cried Captain Davenal.

"Neal."

"Neal!"

"Neal — as I suspect."

"But I thought Neal was so faithful a man — so good a servant altogether!"

"An excellent servant, though I have never liked him. And latterly I have suspected the man's truth and honesty. I don't mean his honesty in regard to goods and chattels, but in regard to his own nature. If my letters have been opened, rely upon it, it is he who has done it."

"Have you spoken to him?"

"No. I shall speak now, though."

Dr. Davenal rang the bell, and Neal appeared. So calm, so quietly unconcerned! — not in the least like a man who has just tampered with his master's letters.

"Come forward, Neal. Shut the door for a minute. When I went out just now I left this note on the table — the one you brought in to me from Lady Oswald's servant. I did not open it before I went out; — but it looks to me as if it had been opened since, and closed up again."

Dr. Davenal spoke in a quiet tone. Neal, entirely unruffled, save by a slight natural surprise, stepped close up to the table, and looked first at Dr. Davenal and then at the note, which, however, the doctor did not particularly show to him.

"I should think not, sir. There has been no one here to open it."

"That it has been opened I feel certain. Who has been in the room?"

"Not any one, sir," replied Neal. "It has not been entered, so far as I know, since you left it."

There was nothing more to be said, and Dr. Davenal signed to him to go. "I could not accuse him downright," he remarked to his son; "but enough has been said to put him on his guard not to attempt such a thing again."

"He does not look like a guilty man," cried Captain Davenal. "It is next to impossible to suspect Neal of such a thing. He is too — too — I was going to say too much of a gentleman," broke off Captain Davenal, laughing at his own words. "At any rate, too respectable. His manner betrayed nothing of guilt — nothing of cognisance of the affair. I watched him narrowly."

"True; it did not. He is an innocent man, Ned, or else a finished hypocrite. Of course I may be wrong in my suspicions: honestly to confess it, I have no cause to suspect Neal, beyond the powerful feeling in my mind that he's not to be trusted — a feeling for which I have never been able to account, although it has been upon me since the first day I engaged him."

"We do take up prejudices without knowing why," remarked Captain Davenal. "I suppose sometimes they are false ones. — Here's Neal coming in again."

"I beg your pardon, sir, for having so positively assured you that no one had been in your room," he said, addressing his master. "I remember now that Mr. Cray entered it. I did not think of it, sir, at the moment you questioned me."

"If he did, he'd not touch the letter," said Dr. Davenal.

"Certainly not, sir. But I thought it right to come and mention to you that he had been in."

Neal withdrew, and Captain Davenal looked at his father. "The man seems quite honest in the matter. I think this is an additional proof of it. Had he opened the letter himself he would not have forgotten that another person had been in the room."

Very soon Neal appeared again. This time it was to say that dinner was served. Dr. Davenal nodded to him to close the door; he and his son were deep in conversation.

Ten minutes elapsed before they came out. Miss Bettina fidgeted and grumbled, but it did not bring them; and when they did come, the doctor had a strange cloud upon his brow. Edward also, or else Sara fancied it; but he grew merry as the dinner advanced, joking and laughing with every one.

She took the opportunity of speaking to him after dinner. He went out on the lawn at the back to smoke his cigar in the starlight, and Sara stole after him. He threw his arm round her, and they paced the gravel walk.

"Were you telling papa before dinner that you should have to leave to-morrow?" she asked.

"I was telling him worse than that, my little sister."

"Worse?"

"You loving ones at home will think it so. You will, Sara. And my father — it's a blow to my father."

Sara Davenal's heart was beating against her side; a thousand improbabilities rushed into her brain. "Tell it me, Edward," she said, very calmly. Sometimes, in moments of agitation, she could be calm, almost unnaturally so, outwardly. It is frequently the case with those who feel the deepest.

"The regiment's ordered abroad."

"O Edward!"

For a few minutes neither spoke again. Sara's greatest thought was for her father. She seemed to have divined how cruelly Dr. Davenal felt the separation from his sons; Richard dead, Edward in London with his regiment. If he had to go abroad to remote countries, thousands of miles away — why, almost as good that he had died. They should feel it so.

"And that explains why I could not get a long leave," he resumed. "There's so much of preparation to be made; and we officers have to look to everything, for the men as well as for ourselves. We sail in a week or two."

They paced on in silence. Captain Davenal suddenly looked down at her, and detected tears.

"Don't grieve, child. I am but a worthless sort of brother, after all — never with you. Perhaps I shall come back a better one."

"Edward, can't you sell out?"

"Sell out!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "Sell out because we are ordered on active service. You are a brave soldier's sister, Miss Sara Davenal!"

"Some time ago, when there was a question of the regiment's going out, you were to have exchanged into another, and remained at home, Edward. It was just after Richard's death, I remember. Can you not do that now?"

"No, I cannot. I can neither sell out nor exchange. It is impossible."

There was so much grave meaning in his tone, that Sara looked up involuntarily. He laughed at her earnest face.

"O Edward! *must* you go?"

"There's no help for it. We go to Malta first. India — as we suppose — afterwards."

"Papa may be dead before you return."

"No, no! I trust not."

"It will be as though he had no children!" she exclaimed, almost passionately, in her love for her father, in her grief.

"Richard dead; you gone: he will have none left."

"He will have you, Sara."

"I! Who am I?"

"The best of us. You have given him no grief in all your life; I and poor Dick have: plenty. It is best as it is, Sara."

She could scarcely speak for the sobs that were rising. She strove bravely to beat them down, for Sara Davenal's was an undemonstrative nature, and could not bear that its signs of emotion should be betrayed outwardly. She loved her brother greatly; even the more, as the doctor did, for the loss of Richard; and this going abroad for an indefinite period, perhaps for ever, rang in her ears as the very knell of hope. He might never return: he might go away, as Richard had, only to die.

How long they continued to pace that walk underneath the privet-hedge, which skirted and hid the narrow sidepath leading from the house to the stables, Sara scarcely knew. Captain Davenal spoke little, he seemed buried in thought; Sara could not speak at all, her heart was full. Rarely had the night's brilliant stars looked down on a sadness deeper felt than was that of Sara Davenal.

"You will come down again to take leave of us?" she asked, after a while.

"Of course I shall."

CHAPTER X.

A Treat for Neal.

NEARLY four-and-twenty hours subsequent to that, Dr. Davenal was pacing the same walk side by side with Lady Oswald. The wedding was over, the guests were gone, and the house, after the state breakfast, had resumed its tranquillity. Of the guests, Lady Oswald had alone remained, with the exception of Mr. Oswald Cray. It was one of those elaborate breakfast-dinners which take hours to eat, and five o'clock had struck ere the last carriage drove from the door.

Lady Oswald asked for some tea; Miss Davenal, as great a lover of tea as herself, partook of it with her. Captain

Davenal preferred a cigar, and went into the garden to smoke it: Mr. Oswald Cray accompanied him, but he never smoked. Both of them were to return to town by the seven o'clock train.

By and by, the tea over, the rest came out on the lawn to join them — Lady Oswald and Miss Davenal in their rich rustling silks, Sara in her white bridesmaid's dress. The open air of the warm, lovely evening, was inexpressibly grateful after the feasting and fuss of the day, and they lingered until twilight fell on the earth. Miss Davenal went in then: but Lady Oswald wrapped her Indian cashmere shawl, worth a hundred guineas Hallingham said, more closely round her, and continued to talk to Dr. Davenal as they paced together the side walk.

Her chief theme was the one on which you have already heard her descant — that unwelcome project of the railway sheds. It had dropped through for a time. There had been a lull in the storm ever since it was broached in the summer. Lady Oswald complacently believed her remonstrance had found weight with the authorities of the line, to whom she had addressed a long, if not a very temperate letter: but, in point of fact, the commencement of the work had been delayed for some convenience of their own. Only on this very morning a rumour had reached Lady Oswald's ears that it was now to be set about immediately.

"I am not satisfied with Oswald," she was saying to the doctor. "Did you observe how he avoided the subject at the breakfast-table? When I told him that he might exercise his influence with the company and prevent it if he pleased, he turned it off quietly."

"I think he did not care to defend himself publicly, or to enter upon the matter," observed the doctor. "Rely upon it,

he would prevent it if he could; but his power does not extend so far."

"I know he *says* it does not," was the observation of Lady Oswald. "Do you think he is true?"

"True!" repeated Dr. Davenal, scarcely understanding in his surprise. "Oswald Cray true! Yes, Lady Oswald. Never man lived yet more honestly true than Oswald Cray."

He looked towards Oswald Cray as he spoke, pacing the broad middle walk with his son and Sara; at the calm good face with its earnest expression, every line, every feature speaking truth and honour; and the doctor's judgment re-echoed his words.

"Yes, Lady Oswald, he is a *true* man, whatever else he may be."

"I always deemed him so. But — to protest that he would help me if he could; and now to let this dreadful threat arise again!"

"But he cannot prevent its arising," returned the doctor, wishing Lady Oswald would exercise a little common sense in the matter. "He is but a servant of the company, and must carry out their wishes."

"I don't believe it," peevishly replied Lady Oswald. "He is the engineer to the company; and it is well known that an engineer does as he pleases, and lays his own plans."

"He is one of the engineers; the junior one, it may be said. I suppose you will not forgive me, Lady Oswald, if I point out, that when your interests and the line's are at issue, as in this matter, Oswald Cray, of all others, is forced to obey the former."

"Was there ever so monstrously wicked a project formed?" asked Lady Oswald, with some agitation.

"It is very unfortunate," was the more temperate reply. "I wish they had fixed upon any grounds but yours."

"I wish they had! It will send me into my grave!"

Careless words! spoken, as such words mostly are spoken, unmeaningly. If Lady Oswald could but have known how miserably they were destined to be marked out! If Dr. Davenal had but foreseen how that marking out would affect all his after life — change, as it were, its current, and that of one who was dear to him!

"And because that worry was not enough, I have had a second to annoy me to-day," resumed Lady Oswald. "Jones gave warning to leave."

"Indeed!" returned Dr. Davenal, and the tone of his voice betrayed his concern. He knew how minor vexations were made troubles of by Lady Oswald; and the parting with Jones, her steady coachman of many years, would be a trouble not much less great than this threatened building of the sheds.

"Why is Jones leaving?" he inquired.

"Because he does not know when he's well off," was the retort, spoken querulously. "The servants latterly have been all quarrelling together, I find, and Jones says he won't remain. I asked Parkins what she was good for not to stop their quarrelling, and she burst into tears in my face, and said it was not her fault. You are best off, doctor. Your servants are treasures. Look at Neal!"

"I don't know that Neal is much of a treasure," was the doctor's answer. "I'd make him over to your ladyship with all the pleasure in life. Do you feel the chill of the evening air?"

Lady Oswald looked up at the clear sky, at the evening star, just visible, and said she did not feel the chill yet.

Dr. Davenal resumed.

"I have grown to dislike Neal, Lady Oswald. In strict correctness, however, 'grown to dislike' is not the best term,

for I have disliked him ever since he has been with me. He" ——

"Disliked Neal!" interrupted Lady Oswald, wondering whether she might trust her ears. "You dislike Neal! Why?"

"I can scarcely tell you why. I don't think I know, myself. But I do very much dislike him; and the dislike grows upon me."

"You never mentioned this. I thought you were so satisfied with Neal."

"I have not mentioned it. I have felt a sort of repugnance to mention what would appear so unfounded a prejudice. Neal is an efficient servant, and the dislike arose to me without cause, just as instincts do. Latterly, however, I begin to doubt whether Neal is so desirable a retainer as we have deemed him."

"In what way do you doubt him?"

Dr. Davenal smiled. "A doubt has arisen to me whether he is *true* — as you have just said by Mr. Oswald Cray. I shall watch the man; and, now that my suspicions are awakened, detection will be more easy. Should he turn out to be what I fear — a deceitful fellow, worse than worthless — he will be sent out of my house head foremost, at a minute's warning, and get his true character. Lady Oswald, I think I could pardon anything rather than deceit."

"How angrily you speak!" breathlessly exclaimed Lady Oswald.

The words recalled him to courtesy.

"I fear I did; and I ought to have remembered that he was a respected servant once of Sir John's, that it was you who recommended him to me. You will pardon my warmth, Lady Oswald. To any less close friend than yourself I should not have mentioned this. The fact is, a most unjustifiable trick

was played me yesterday, and it is impossible for me to suspect anybody but Neal. I shall watch him."

"What trick was it?" asked Lady Oswald.

Dr. Davenal hesitated before he spoke. "Perhaps it would be scarcely fair to mention it, even to you, Lady Oswald. I am not certain: there's just a loop-hole of possibility. If I find I am wrong, I will honestly confess it to you; if the contrary, you and the world will know what a worthless scamp we have nourished in Neal."

Very agreeable words indeed! especially to Neal himself, who had the satisfaction of hearing them. Mr. Neal, with his soft tread, was gingerly pacing the narrow path behind the privet-hedge, his steps keeping level with theirs; he having strolled out to take the evening air, and to hear all that he could hear.

They were interrupted by the approach of Captain Davenal and Mr. Oswald Cray. It was getting towards the hour of their departure. Sara came up with them. The doctor laid his hand on his daughter's shoulder, and she walked by his side.

"Going? Nonsense!" said the doctor. "There's no hurry yet."

"When shall you be down again, Oswald?" asked my lady.

"I believe very shortly. I must be down — about these alterations," he had been on the point of saying, but stopped himself in time. There was no cause for bringing up the sore story oftener to her than was necessary.

"Will you promise that they shall not build those horrible sheds?"

"If it lay with me, I would willingly promise it," was his reply. "I wish you would believe me, dear Lady Oswald."

"Of course I have no claim upon you," she fretfully con-

tinued. "I know that. It is not my fault, if I am unable to leave my fortune to you — what little I may have to leave. There are others who, in my opinion, have a greater claim upon me."

He seemed not to understand her. He turned his glance full upon her. "I beg your pardon. What did you say, Lady Oswald?"

"Oswald, I have never spoken distinctly to you about my money," she resumed. "I like you very much, and should have been glad to leave some to you: it is natural you should be looking out for it, but" —

Every line of his pale face was ablaze with pride as he interrupted her; his voice, calm, low, terribly stern, was ten times more impressive in its truth than one loud and angry could have been. "Allow me to set you right, Lady Oswald. I have never in my life looked for one shilling of money from you: I do not recognise, or believe in, or see any claim I can by possibility have upon it: of the whole world, the Oswalds are those upon whom I could least recognise it — from whom I would the least accept it. I pray your ladyship to understand me in the fullest sense of the words — *from whom I would never accept it.*"

Never had he looked so like the Oswalds as he looked then. The red colour came into Sara's cheeks, and a faint sense of dread (did it come as a prophetic warning?) stole into her heart — that that pride might prove her deadliest enemy; perhaps his. Lady Oswald's mood changed, and she laughed.

"You are independent, Oswald."

"I am self-dependent," was his answer. "A fair field and no favour are all I ask. I believe I can make my way in the world far better than money could make it for me. It is what I mean to try at — and do, Heaven helping me."

"But you need not have glared at me in that way," she

said, relapsing into fretfulness. "I declare I thought it was old Sir Oswald of Thorndyke come out of his grave. My nerves are not strong, and that you know."

A better feeling came over him, and he held out his hand to Lady Oswald, his atoning smile wonderfully frank and sweet. "Forgive me if anything in my speech or manner has offended you, dear Lady Oswald. But I believe you vexed me more than I have ever been vexed in my life."

"Well, well; you shall be as independent as you please," said Lady Oswald. "Let us change the subject. When do you intend to follow Mark's example and marry?"

"Not until I can afford it better than — than Mark could, I was going to say," he added, glancing at Dr. Davenal and laughing.

"You do mean to marry some time, Oswald?"

"I hope so."

The answer was spoken so fervently, that they looked at him in surprise. Sara contrived to draw behind, and began plucking one of the flowers, already closing to the night. He resumed carelessly, as if conscious that his tones had been too earnest for general ears.

"Men do marry for the most part in this good old-fashioned land of ours, and my turn may come some time. I think our time is nearly up, Davenal."

The captain took out his watch. "We can walk it in ten minutes, if we put out our best speed."

As they went in, Oswald Cray looked round for Sara, and found she had not followed them. He turned back to her.

"I must say good-bye to you. Sara! you are crying!"

"O no," she answered, brushing away the rebellious tears. "It's nothing."

He took her hand and placed it within his arm, and they advanced slowly to the house. "Will you tell me what the

'nothing' is?" he asked in a low tone, which of itself was sufficient to invite confidence.

"I cannot bear to part with Edward," she answered. "Nothing has been said about it; but he brought down bad news. They are ordered to Malta; and thence, he thinks, they shall go to India. Edward said he should tell you as you went back to-night."

It was entire news to him, and he thought how greatly Dr. Davenal must feel it. Few admired that fine young officer, Edward Davenal, more than Oswald Cray. But he had no time to discuss it now, scarcely to say a word of sympathy.

"Good-bye!" he whispered, as they halted on the threshold and he turned to press her hand in both of his, bending his face a little down. "Good-bye. And remember."

"Remember what?" she asked.

"That you don't belong quite to yourself now."

He hastened in, leaving Sara standing there: standing there with the significant words and their meaning beating pleasant changes on her heart. Captain Davenal came springing out.

"Hush, darling, be brave!" he said, as he took the kiss from his sister's lips. "Leave all that until I come down for my real farewell."

And Sara was brave, and dried her tears, and confided in the prospect of that real farewell; little dreaming that it was destined never to be spoken.

CHAPTER XI.

Lady Oswald's Journey.

MR. MARCUS CRAY'S marriage had taken place on a Thursday, and the time went on to the following Saturday week with little to mark it. Enough, as events were unhappily to turn out, was to mark it then. They, Marcus Cray and his wife, were expected home that evening: but it is not with them that we have just at present to do.

On this Saturday morning, Oswald Cray had come down to Hallingham on business connected with the line. In the course of the day he called on Lady Oswald, and found her in a state not easy to describe. That very morning certain men had been seen on her grounds, marking off the small portion of its boundaries intended to be taken for the sheds. Convinced that all her hopes of immunity had been but vain dreams, she had become angry, hysterical, almost violent. Oswald Cray had never seen her like this.

It was an illustration of the misery we may inflict upon ourselves, the evil spirit that will arise from self-grievance. In point of fact, these sheds, to be built on a remote and low portion of her land, could not prove any real annoyance to Lady Oswald; she would not see them from her window; she did not go, ever, near the spot. The grievance lay in her imagination; she had made it a bugbear, and there it was. In vain Oswald Cray pointed out to her that it had been the same thing with regard to the rail itself. When she first heard it was to skirt her grounds, she had been as alarmed as she was now; but when the work was complete, the trains were actually running, then Lady Oswald found (though she did not acknowledge it) how void of reason her alarm had been; had the trains been fifty miles off she could not have seen less

of them. It would be so with regard to the sheds, Oswald Cray told her; he told her that even a less portion of the ground would be taken than was at first intended: he did not add that he, by his persistent efforts in her cause, had obtained this little concession, but he might have told her so with truth. He assured her that the thing *could not* prove an annoyance to her. All in vain. He might just as well have talked to the winds. She would not listen. Parkins sat in tears, administering specifics for the "nerves," and entreating my lady to be tranquil. My lady replied by saying she should never be tranquil again, and she actually abused Mr. Oswald Cray.

"Nay," said Oswald, good-humouredly, "it is your landlord you should blame, not me. He agreed to the thing instant — the moment it was proposed to him."

Lady Oswald's cheeks were burning as she turned to Oswald. "If he had refused, instead of consented, what then? Could they have done it in spite of him?"

"It would have been done eventually, I suppose. Not just yet: the company would have had to bargain with him, perhaps to dispute the matter with him legally: and all that takes time."

"Had he persistently contended against it, the company might have grown weary; have ended by fixing upon some other spot for their sheds," she breathlessly cried, the excitement on her face deepening.

Mr. Oswald Cray hesitated. "It is possible, certainly; but" —

"I will go to him," broke in Lady Oswald. "I will go to Low this very hour."

She started from her seat, upsetting a bottle which Parkins held in her hand, almost upsetting Parkins herself in her vehemence. Mr. Oswald Cray gently restrained her.

"My dear Lady Oswald, you will do no good by going to Low now. It is too late. The thing has gone too far."

"It has not gone too far, Oswald Cray. So long as the sheds are not begun it cannot be too late. If Low did give his consent, he can retract it. The land is freehold, and freehold land cannot be seized upon lightly. Get my things, Parkins, and order the carriage." And Parkins submissively retired to obey.

"Lady Oswald, believe me," said Oswald, impressively, "Mr. Low cannot now retract his consent if he would. The agreement is signed; nay, I believe the money is paid. Your going to him will do no possible good; it can only be productive of further unpleasantness to yourself."

"Have you a motive in keeping me away from him?" asked Lady Oswald, and his brow momentarily contracted at her blind pertinacity. "Do you know that I have never once seen him upon this subject? — never once."

"No!" he said, really wondering at the omission.

"I would not go to see him; I was too angry; I contented myself with writing to him, and telling him what I thought; and then, you know, until this blessed morning, when Jones came into the house with the news that the men were measuring the land, I never thought the thing would be really done. I will go to him now, Oswald Cray, and all you can say against it will not avail with me. If you had any courtesy you would accompany me, and add your voice to mine against this unjustifiable wrong."

Courtesy was an adjunct in which Oswald Cray was not naturally deficient; in time, that day, he *was*. The business which brought him down was pressing, must have his full attention, and be finished so as to enable him to return to town that night. He had snatched these few minutes, while

the clerks at the company's offices were at dinner, just to see Lady Oswald.

"It would give me great pleasure to escort you anywhere, Lady Oswald, but to-day I really cannot absent myself from Hallingham. I have my hands full. Besides," he added, a frank smile on his face, "have you forgotten how impossible it would be for me to go against the agreement made by the company with Mr. Low, by soliciting that gentleman to attempt to retract it?"

"I see," said Lady Oswald, beating her foot pettishly on the carpet; "better that I had called anybody to my aid than you. Are you cherishing resentment against me, Oswald Cray?"

Oswald Cray opened his dark blue eyes in surprise.

"Resentment? — against you, Lady Oswald! Indeed I do not understand you."

"I thought you might be remembering what I said at Dr. Davenal's, the evening of your brother's wedding. I mean about the money; which I said I could *not* leave you," she continued in a low tone. "You took me up so sharply."

"I fear I did. I was vexed that you could so misapprehend my nature. We need not recur to the subject, Lady Oswald. Let it pass."

"I must say a word first, Oswald. I believe, with all your fiery pride, and your aptitude to take offence, that your nature is honest and true; that you would save me from annoyance if you could."

"I would indeed," he interrupted, earnestly. "Even from this threatened annoyance I would doubly save you, if it were at all within my power."

"Well, I want to say just this. I have always liked you very well; you have been, in fact, a favourite of mine; and

many a time it has occurred to me to wish that I could put you down in my will" ——

"Lady Oswald, I pray you" ——

"Now do be quiet, and hear me. I consider it a duty to myself to tell you this, and I always intended to tell you before my death. I fully believe what you say; that you do not wish for my money, that you would prefer to make your own way; I say I fully believe that, Oswald. There are some men — honourable to fastidiousness, I call them — who are utterly incapable of casting a thought or a wish to the money of others: you are one, as I believe; and there's the additional bar in your case with regard to my money, that it comes from the Oswalds. I don't think you would accept money, in whatever form it came to you, from the Oswald family."

"I don't think I would," replied Oswald. And he spoke the truth of his heart.

"Still, I judge it right to give you this little word of explanation," she proceeded. "I daresay, whenever my will comes to be read, that you will feel surprised at its contents; may even deem that you had more legal claim upon me than he who will chiefly inherit. I do not think so. I have left my money to please myself: he to whom it is left has the best claim upon me in my judgment. I am happy to know that he will be rewarded: and he knows it."

Oswald felt a little puzzled: the words "and he knows it" somewhat excited his curiosity. With her own family, who alone (in Oswald Cray's opinion), could be said to have claims on Lady Oswald, she held but little communication: and a conviction stole over him that she did not allude to them. He was destined (as it proved) never to forget those words; and the construction he put upon them was, that the future inheritor of the money knew he was named as the in-

heritor. He said nothing. It was not a subject he cared to pursue; he had neither right nor inclination to inquire as to the disposal of what Lady Oswald might leave behind her. Had he dreamt of the ill those words would work, he might have asked further particulars.

"I thought I'd say this to you some time, Oswald. Had you been less fiercely proud; and I more at liberty to dispose of what I have to leave, I should regret not remembering you. As it is, perhaps all's for the best."

That again struck upon him as strange: "I more at liberty to dispose of what I have to leave." Was she not at full and entire liberty? — if so, why was she not? The question set Oswald thinking.

But circumstances seemed inclined to prove themselves stronger than Lady Oswald's will, in regard to this visit to her landlord. Her coachman made his appearance with hindering news: one of the carriage horses had fallen lame.

"Accept it as an omen that the visit would have brought forth no good luck," said Oswald Cray, with a smile, while Jones stood, deprecating his lady's anger.

A doubt flashed across her mind for a moment whether the excuse was real, and the amazed Jones had to repeat it, and to assure his mistress that he was going "right off" for the veterinary surgeon then.

"It will not avail," said Lady Oswald. "I shall go by train. Perhaps you can tell me, Oswald Cray, at what hours the trains leave for Hildon?"

Oswald Cray said not another word of objection. To make use of the railroad, to which her dislike had been so insuperable, proved that she was indeed bent upon it. He bade her good-day and left, and encountered Dr. Davenal's carriage in the avenue. The doctor was arriving on his usual daily visit.

She was somewhat of a capricious woman, Lady Oswald. A few months before, in the summer time, Dr. Davenal had been hoping, it may almost be said secretly plotting — but the plotting was very innocent — to get Lady Oswald to favour Mark Cray sufficiently to allow of *his* paying these daily visits. Since then Lady Oswald had, of her own accord, become excessively attached to Mark. That is, attached in one sense of the word. It was not the genuine esteem founded on long intimacy, the love, it may be almost said, that draws one friend to another; it was that artificial liking which suddenly arises, and has its result in praising and patronising; artificial because so shallow. In the new feeling, Lady Oswald had not only sanctioned Mark's visits to her in the place of Dr. Davenal, but she had recommended him to everybody she knew as the cleverest young surgeon in Hallingham or out of it. It had been Mark's luck speedily to cure some fancied or real ailment of Lady Oswald's in a notably short space of time, and Lady Oswald, who set it down to skill, really had taken up the notion that he had not his equal. We all know how highly-coloured for the time are these sudden estimations of a popular doctor's skill. None rejoiced more than Dr. Davenal, and he resigned Lady Oswald to Mark with inward satisfaction, and the best grace in the world. But during Mark's absence on his wedding-tour the doctor had taken again the daily visits.

Roger pulled up in the gravel drive when he saw Mr. Oswald Cray; but Oswald, who had out-stayed his time, could only shake hands with the doctor and hasten onwards. Parkins met Dr. Davenal surreptitiously as he entered: she had seen his approach, and she stole forwards on tiptoe to meet him, her tears dropping. When Lady Oswald was in her fretful moods, Parkins generally found refuge in tears.

"What's the matter now?" asked the doctor.

"The men have begun to measure the ground, and that stupid Jones came running open-mouthed to the house with the news, and my lady heard him," explained Parkins. "I'd not have told her: if people held their tongues, the sheds might be built, and up, and she never know it. I thought she'd have gone out of her mind, sir; and then Mr. Oswald Cray came in, and he talked to her. I think she's calmer now; I heard her talking quietly to Mr. Oswald Cray before he left. But she says she'll go off by rail to Mr. Low's."

"Is she in the drawing-room?"

"Yes, sir. So well, to be sure, as she was this morning!" continued Parkins, drying her tears. "I don't know when she has been in such spirits, and all because Mr. Cray was coming home to-night with his wife. The fancy she has taken for him is extraordinary: she has been counting the days off since he was away, like a schoolgirl counts them off before her holidays."

Dr. Davenal entered. He did not attempt to reason Lady Oswald out of the visit to Mr. Low. Quite the contrary. He told her the short trip by rail would do her good: and he thought, which he did *not* tell her, that the interview with Mr. Low might set the affair at rest sooner than anything else would, by convincing her that there could be no appeal against the fiat, no delay in the carrying out of the work.

When Lady Oswald reached the station, it happened that Oswald Cray was there. He was emerging from one of the private rooms with some plans under his arm when he saw her. She looked scared at the bustle of the station, and was leaning helplessly on her maid's arm, uncertain where to go, what to do. Oswald hastened to her and took her on his arm. Parkins slipped behind, quite thankful to see him: she was as little used to the ways and confusion of a station as her mistress.

"Will you venture still, Lady Oswald, with all this turmoil?"

"Will you cease worrying me?" she answered, and the tone was a sharp one, for she fancied he still wished to stop her, and resented the intermeddling with her will.

Did he wish to stop her? If any such feeling was upon him, it must surely have been instinct: a prevision of what the ill-fated journey would bring forth; of the influence it would indirectly bear on his own future life.

He said no more. He led Lady Oswald at once to a first-class carriage, placed her and Parkins in it, procured their return tickets, and then leaned over the carriage door and talked to Lady Oswald, ill as he could spare the time. No man had kinder feelings at heart than Oswald Cray, and it seemed to him scarcely courteous to leave her — for she was in a tremor still — until the train should start.

He talked to her in a gay laughing tone of indifferent subjects, and she grew more at ease. "Only think!" she suddenly exclaimed, "I may return with Mr. Cray and his wife! Dr. Davenal told me to-day they were expected early in the evening; and this is the way they must come. I shall be so glad when he is home!"

Oswald shook his head at her with mock seriousness. "I'd not acknowledge my faithlessness so openly, were I you, Lady Oswald. To turn off Dr. Davenal for Mark, after so many years' adhesion to him!"

"You know nothing about it, Oswald. I have not turned off Dr. Davenal. But you may depend upon one thing — that Mark is a rising man. He will make a greater name than you in the world."

"Very likely. I hope he will make a name. For myself" —

The whistle sounded, and Oswald drew away from the

door. Lady Oswald put out her hand, and he shook it warmly. "Shall I see you on my return?"

"Possibly, just a glimpse," he answered. "I'll look out for you when the train comes in. Good-bye."

"But you'll wish me luck, Oswald — although you may be bound in honour to the interests of the enemy and those wretched sheds."

"I wish it you heartily and sincerely; in all ways, Lady Oswald."

His tone was hearty as his words, his clasp sincere. Lady Oswald withdrew her hand, and left him a pleasant, cordial smile as the train puffed on.

"One can't help liking him, Parkins, with all his obstinate contrariness," she cried. "I wish he had been the surgeon! Only think what a name he would have made, had he possessed his brother's talent!"

"So he would, my lady," dutifully acquiesced Parkins.

"What a good thing we are alone! Most likely he contrived it. I declare I don't dislike this," continued Lady Oswald, ranging her eyes round the well-stuffed compartment. "It is almost as private as my own carriage."

"So it is, my lady," answered Parkins. And the train went smoothly on, and in twenty minutes' time Lady Oswald was deposited safely at the Hildon station.

CHAPTER XII.

Waiting for News.

MARK CRAY and his wife had not indicated the precise hour of their return: "early in the evening, but not to dinner; have tea ready," had been Mrs. Cray's words to her servants in the letter received by them on Friday morning. Sara Davenal went to the abbey about five o'clock to wait for them.

Mark and Caroline were beginning as prudently as their best friends could desire; two maid-servants only, engaged under the careful eye of Miss Bettina, comprised their household. The large heavy door of the abbey opened to a large stone hall; on the left of this was a large sitting-room, with cross-beams in its ceiling and deep-mullioned windows, looking on to the branching lines of rails and the station in the distance; not so pleasant a view as had been the gay abbey gardens. Indeed, with the doing away of those gardens, the pleasantest part of the abbey, as a residence, had gone. It was a rambling sort of place inside, with very little comfort. This room and the drawing-room above were the only good-sized rooms in the house; four modern rooms might have been put into that drawing-room, and what its carpeting had cost was something to be talked of. The bedchambers were pigeon-holes, the domestic offices dark closets, paved with stone; in short, the abbey was a grander place in sound than it was pleasant for use. The Crays, who had lived in it so long, were party-giving people, thinking more of show than comfort; the pigeon-holes were good enough for them; the dark stone kitchens might be made the best of by the servants; the great drawing-room, larger than anybody else's in Hallingham, gladdened their hearts. It was certainly an imposing room when filled with company and lights.

Sara Davenal waited and waited in the downstairs room. She had taken off her things, and made herself at home. Her dress was of dark-blue silk, the bands of her brown hair were smooth and silken, and excitement had brought a colour to her cheeks. She had never before been parted from Caroline since the latter arrived, years ago, from the West Indies. The tea was on the table in readiness, with a cold fowl and tongue, thoughtfully ordered to be provided by Miss Davenal.

Five o'clock; half-past five; six o'clock; half-past six;

seven o'clock; and still they had not come. Sara grew impatient — it is of no use to deny it — and blamed them for want of punctuality. They had not bargained for her feverish longing.

She stood at the window, looking still, as she had done since five o'clock. It had grown into night since she stood there; would have grown to dark, but for the brilliant moon that lighted the heavens. A servant came in.

“Shall I bring lights, miss?”

“Not yet. I want to watch for the train!”

The maid retired. Sara waited on — waited and waited, until she felt sure that it must be half-past seven; but then she was counting time by her own impatience, not by the clock. Her eyes began to grow weary with the intense and incessant gaze at the station, and she could see a good many people standing at its entrance in the moonlight — stragglers, no doubt, waiting for the train, wondering, like herself, that it was not in, and what had become of it.

As she thus stood, there was a loud ring at the door-bell. Sara flew into the hall in glee, thinking how stupid she must have been not to observe them crossing the bridge round by the lines; flew into the hall, and was met by her aunt.

Miss Davenal! when she had expected the bridegroom and bride! But Sara had to make the best of it, and she did so in her pleasing, graceful manner, drawing her aunt in by the hand to the dark room.

“They have not come yet, Aunt Bettina.”

“Whatever’s the meaning of this?” was the surprised question of Miss Davenal. “All in the dark! And where are they?”

“They have not come yet,” repeated Sara. “Bring the lights,” she added in a low voice to the servant.

“Not come! Where are they stopping?”

"The train is not in, Aunt Bettina."

"The what's not in?"

"The train."

"Why, what has come to it?"

Miss Bettina, all amazed, and scarcely believing the information, went hastily to the window, and looked towards the station. At that moment the other servant, Dorcas, came into the room. She was not a stranger to the family, having once lived with Miss Davenal, before that lady took up her abode with her brother. Dorcas was getting on to be middle-aged, — a sensible looking woman, with a turned-up nose and reddish hair.

"Miss Sara," she whispered, "they are saying there's been an accident to the train."

Sara Davenal's heart seemed to stand still and then bound on again as if it would break its bounds.

"Who says it?" she gasped.

"I saw the folks standing about, and talking one to the other; so I opened my kitchen winder, and asked what was amiss, and they said the seven o'clock train was not in, that it had met with an accident. Miss Sara" —

But Miss Sara had turned from her. Silently snatching her shawl and bonnet from the sofa where she had laid them, she quitted the room, the unconscious Miss Davenal standing yet at the window. Dorcas followed her, and, by the lights that were now being carried in, she saw how white she looked.

"Miss Sara, I was about to say that it may not be true," continued Dorcas, as Sara hastily flung on her things. "I don't think it is: there'd be more uproar at the station if any news of that sort had been brought in."

"I am going over to see; I cannot remain in this suspense. Not go by myself?" she repeated, in reply to the woman's re-

monstrance; "nonsense, Dorcas! Everybody knows me: I am Dr. Davenal's daughter. You stay with my Aunt Bettina, and be sure don't alarm her if you can help it."

Pulling the door open with her own hand, she passed under the red light of Mr. Cray's professional lamp, and hastened by the side-path and the bridge round to the station. Her face was pale, her pulses were beating. Sara Davenal had a quick imagination, and all the horrors of accidents by rail that she had ever heard seemed to rise up before her.

There was no impediment offered to her entering the station. Several persons were standing about, but they did not appear to notice her, and she passed through the room where the tickets were given, on to the platform. There she found herself in the midst of a crowd. Not a moving crowd, but a waiting crowd, whose faces were mostly turned one way — that by which the expected train ought to come. Sara saw a talkative porter, and got near him, a man she knew.

"Has there been an accident?" she asked.

"Well, miss, there's nothing known for certain. It's odd where the train can be; and if anything *has* happened, it's odder still that the telegraph haven't brought word of it. I remember once she was half an hour late before."

"Who was?" asked Sara, bewildered.

"This here seven o'clock train. 'Twarn't nothing wrong with her then: some of them bothering excursion-trains had blocked up the line. I'd lay, miss, it's the same thing to-night. The doctor ain't gone down the line, is he?"

"No, no. I am expecting my cousin and Mr. Cray."

"It'll be all right, miss. She won't be long. We shall hear her steam directly."

Somewhat reassured, Sara turned, and was pushing her way through the throng, wishing to get clear of it, when she found herself a sort of prisoner. A gentleman had placed his

arm before her, and looking up in the moonlight she discerned the features of Oswald Cray. Her heart gave a great bound of satisfaction, of *love*, and she almost caught at his protecting hand.

It was a curious and exciting scene. The station raising its imposing height to the night sky, so blue and beautiful; the crowd gathered there, unnaturally still in the intensity of awed expectation; the lights and bustle of the town not far away; the noiseless tread of the porters, as they moved restlessly in their suspense; — all made a painfully interesting picture in the bright moonlight.

Oswald Cray was waiting for the in-coming train. It was the one he intended to depart by. He drew Sara away from the throng, and gave her his arm. Her heart was beating at the consciousness of his presence; her whole frame had thrilled at the touch of his hand.

"Is there danger, do you fear?" she whispered.

"No, I trust not. I think not. Were anything wrong, the telegraph would have brought the news. It must be some obstruction on the line."

Sara's fear faded away. She had confidence in *him*. If he, so experienced, the line's own engineer, saw no cause for dread, why should she? Perhaps she could not quite banish one little corner of doubt in her heart; perhaps Mr. Oswald Cray might have some slight corner of fear himself, which he did not deem it expedient to impart to her.

"Did you get frightened, Sara?" he asked, as they walked slowly to and fro in the moonlight.

"I was at the Abbey waiting for them, and Dorcas, one of their new servants, came to me with the news that people in the street were saying there had been an accident. I was very much frightened, and came away; ran away, I may say," she added smiling, "without saying anything to Aunt Bettina."

"Is she at the Abbey?"

"She has just come. She expected they had returned."

"I fear Lady Oswald is waiting for this train at Hildon," he remarked. "She will not like the delay."

"Indeed! Lady Oswald at Hildon!"

He explained to her how it was: that Lady Oswald had gone to Mr. Low's, and was not yet back. Did you know that I called at your house this afternoon?" he asked.

"No," she said, lifting her head. "Did you call?"

"It was about five o'clock. I have been very busy all day, but I managed to get a minute. You were out, Neal said, and the doctor was out; only Miss Davenal at home, so I did not go in."

"I had come down to the Abbey," said Sara. "I thought they might arrive by an earlier train than this. Are you obliged to go back to London to-night?"

"Quite obliged, if the train shall arrive to take me. What's that?"

Some stir was discernible in the throng. Oswald Cray held his breath, listening for any sound that might indicate the approach of the train; but in the distance he could hear nothing, and the stir, caused perhaps only by the restlessness of waiting, died away. They paced on again.

"Since I saw you, Sara, I have had an offer made me of going abroad."

"To stay long?" she quickly asked. "Where to?"

"To stay a long while, had I accepted it; perhaps for life. In a pecuniary point of view the change would have been an advantageous one: it would have given me a position at once. But the climate is shocking. So I declined."

"Oh, I am glad!" she involuntarily said. "You should not run any of those risks."

"I did not hesitate on my own score. At least, I am not

sure that I should have hesitated, but I really did not think of myself at all in the matter. I did not get so far. I should not like to have gone out alone, Sara: and I felt that I had no right to expose another to these chances; one whom I should then be bound to protect and cherish, so far as man's protection goes, from all ill."

He spoke in what may be called general words, in a general tone, but it was impossible for Sara to misunderstand him. Every pulse within her beat in answer, quietly as she continued to walk, calmly as her eyes rested straight before her. She knew it was his intention not to speak openly, until he could speak to some purpose: and she thought he was right.

"So I resolved to continue where I am, and plod on diligently," he continued. "Advancement, though more slow, will be sure. Do you think I did right?"

"Quite right, quite right," she murmured. And, had they been speaking without reserve to each other, she might have added, "Papa would not like me to go abroad."

A silence ensued. They paced together in that quiet spot away from the busy crowd, the silvery moonlight above, the pure passion of love's first dream filling their hearts within. No need of words: the conscious presence of each was all in all.

"Where can this train be?" exclaimed Oswald at length, breaking the charm of the silence.

Almost as the words left his lips one of the porters came hurriedly up, touching his hat as he spoke.

"There has been a mistake in the telegraph-room, sir. Leastways, some bungle. The train *was* telegraphed from Hildon."

A moment's startled pause on the part of Oswald Cray.

"It was told to me positively that the train had not left, Parker?"

"I know, sir; we all understood it so. But James Eales is come back now, and he says we misunderstood him: that the train was telegraphed at the proper time. There's an accident, sir, for certain; and it's between this and Hildon."

"I think there must be a mistake," murmured Oswald Cray to Sara. "Stay here quietly, away from the crowd."

Giving no further satisfaction to her fears — indeed he could not give it — he walked hastily to the small room used as the telegraph office. The news which the porter had brought to him was spreading elsewhere, and the entrance to it was blocked up with an eager throng. He began to work his way through.

"By your leave, by your leave, good people. And they drew aside so as to give room for him to pass when they saw who it was. Mr. Oswald Cray's right of authority, as being superior to that of any at the station, was known and recognised.

The telegraph clerk was a young man named James Eales. It was his duty to receive the messages, and in due course he ought to have received the one from Hildon, signifying that the expected train (called in familiar terms at Hallingham the seven o'clock train, although it came in five minutes sooner) had duly quitted Hildon. This message was due somewhere about twenty-three minutes to seven, and it came this evening as usual quite punctually. No sooner had it been received than James Eales, who wanted to absent himself for a short while on an errand to the town, asked one of the men to take his place. Other messages might be expected relating to the trains, not to speak of private messages, always liable to come: and the man took the place accordingly. As Eales was going out, the man, whose name was Williams, called after him to know whether the train was signalled. Eales thought he meant the down-train, whose

signal was nearly due, and replied, "No, not yet." But in point of fact Williams had alluded to the up-train from Hildon, which *had* been signalled. That man was an accurate time-keeper; it wanted two or three minutes yet to the signalling of the down-train, and he would not have been likely, from this very accuracy, to inquire whether that message had come, it not being due. Eales, who did not possess the like innate accuracy, and was besides in a hurry to depart, confused the question, and took it to allude to the down-train. It is through these mistakes, which are caused half by carelessness, half by what may be almost called unavoidable misapprehension, that accidents occur. It did not lead to the accident in this case, but it has led to many a one. Williams ought to have said, "Is the *up*-train signalled?" Saying what he did say, "Is the train signalled?" Eales should have answered, "The up-train is signalled; not the down."

Williams sat down to the desk or bureau, the telegraph indicator being in front of him, above his head. Precisely to time the down telegraph came, a confirmation it may almost be said of the mistake. Williams noted it, and wondered what the up-train was about that its signal did not likewise come. After seven o'clock came and passed, and the up-train did not arrive, the station-master, who had been enjoying a little recreative gossip on his own score, and not attending to his duties quite as closely as he might have been, made his appearance in the telegraph office.

"Where's James Eales?" he demanded.

Williams explained. He had stepped out on an errand, and he, Williams, was taking his place. The station-master made no demur to this: Williams was as capable as Eales, and often worked the telegraph.

"Has the up-train been signalled from Hildon?"

"No, sir."

"Not been signalled!" echoed the station-master, in an accent of disbelief.

It has not been signalled for certain," was the reply of Williams. "Eales told me the signal had not come when he left, and I am sure it has not come since."

"Where can it be?" exclaimed the station-master. "I suppose some of those monster excursion-trains are blocking up the line somewhere."

A consolatory conclusion, quite doing away with uneasiness or fear. The station-master promulgated the news that the train had not been signalled from Hildon, together with his own suggestive idea of the offending excursion-trains. He told Mr. Oswald Cray it had not been signalled, and he told others: therefore the officials were perfectly at their ease upon the point, whatever the assembled crowd might be.

It was just five-and-twenty minutes past seven when Eales returned. He had stayed longer than he intended, and he dashed into his office head foremost, catching a glimpse of the crowd on the platform, now quickly increasing.

"What do they want, that lot?" he cried to Williams. "Is anything wrong?"

"They are waiting for the up-train. It's preciously behind time to-night, and I suppose some of them are alarmed — have got friends in it, may be."

"What up-train?" asked Eales.

"The seven o'clock up-train to London."

Eales stood confounded. "Why; is that not come up? An accident must have happened."

"Not obliged to," coolly returned Williams. "It's kept back by the excursion-trains, most likely."

"There are no excursion-trains to-day between this and Hildon," quickly observed Eales.

"It has not got so far yet. It has not passed Hildon."

"It has passed Hildon," replied Eales. "It passed at its proper time, and was signalled up."

Williams turned and stared at Eales with all his might. "Who says it has been signalled up?"

"Who says it! Why, I say it. I got the signal as usual."

"Then how came you to tell me you hadn't had it?" asked Williams.

"I never told you so."

"You did. You'll say black's white next. It was the only question I asked you — whether the up-train had been signalled, and you replied it had not been."

"You said the down-train: you never said the up."

"I meant the up. It's not likely I should ask whether the down-train was signalled, when it wasn't near due! *You* have done a pretty thing!"

How long they might have continued to dispute, one seeking to lay the blame upon the other, it is impossible to say. But at that moment the station-master came in again, and the mistake was made known to him and to others. The train *had* left Hildon at its proper time, and therefore the delay, whatever might be its cause, lay very near to them — in the six miles of rail intervening between Hallingham and Hildon; the train must be on some spot of it.

That an accident of some nature had taken place, the most sanguine could now only believe, and a whole shower of verbal missives was hurled upon the two men, Eales and Williams, who did nothing but retort on each other. Each firmly regarded the other as being alone in fault; an im-

partial judge would have said they were equally culpable. Extricating himself from the confusion, Mr. Oswald Cray returned to Sara. She looked at him with questioning eyes, her heart shrinking; that hubbub in the station had re-awakened her fears. He quietly placed her hand within his arm, and began to pace as before.

"I find things do not look quite so well as we fancied" —

"There has been an accident!" she interrupted. "Do not hide it from me, Oswald!"

He lightly laid his other hand on hers, an assurance of his truth. "I will hide nothing from you, my dearest," and the never-yet-used term of endearment seemed to slip from him involuntarily, in the moment's need that he should soothe her. "We have not heard that there is any accident, for no tidings of any sort have come up; but the train, it seems, did leave Hildon at its usual time, and something must therefore have occurred to delay it."

A deep, sobbing sigh nearly broke from her, but she coughed it down.

"Do not meet trouble half-way," he said in a lighter tone. "It does not follow that an accident, in the popular sense of the term, must have occurred, because the train is not up. The engine may have broken down and be unable to come on, but the passengers may be as safe and well as we are. There's no doubt the engine is disabled, or it would have come on for assistance."

"Assistance for the wounded?" she quickly rejoined.

"Assistance that may be wanted in any way. The telegraph is at work to stop all trains, and some of us are going down" —

It was the last collected word they were enabled to speak. The news had spread in the town, and the affrighted people were coming up in shoals. News, at the best, loses nothing

in carrying, and the delay was magnified into a dreadful accident, with half the train killed. In the midst of it the guard of the missing train arrived, flying up the line as if for his life, and carrying a lantern.

The engine had run off the line on to the bank, and turned over. A few of the passengers were injured, but he thought not many; some of them were coming on, the field way. It had occurred about midway between the two stations, a little nearer to Hallingham than to the other. An engine was wanted to bring on the train, and it might be as well if a doctor or two went down.

This was the climax for the affrighted crowd, and those who had relatives in the train seemed to wellnigh lose their senses. A scene of inextricable confusion ensued. Some were restrained by force from jumping on the line and setting off to the scene of accident; some strove to get upon the carriage and engine about to start for it. Order was restored with great difficulty, and the carriage and engine rescued from the invaders, who then quitted the station, and set off to run to the scene, through the same fields that, as the guard said, passengers were advancing.

Two medical men, who had been hastily obtained, Mr. Oswald Cray, and sundry officials of the line, took their seats in the carriage to be conveyed to the spot. The engine had given its first puff, and was snorting off, when a loud shout arrested it.

“Stop! stop! One single moment! Here’s Dr. Davenal!”

His name, for those poor wounded ones, was a tower of strength — worth all the rest of the surgical skill in Hallingham — and he was pulled into the carriage, having caught a glimpse of the white face of his daughter outside the throng. Sara, terrified and bewildered, wondering what she should do next, was suddenly pounced upon by Miss Davenal.

"You naughty girl! What is it that you are doing here?"

"O Aunt Bettina, there has been an accident to the train! Caroline and Mr. Cray are sure to be in it."

"Caroline and Mr. Cray are what?" cried out Miss Bettina.

"I fear they are in the train. There has been an accident between here and Hildon. An engine has just gone down with assistance."

"I don't want to know about engines," returned Miss Davenal, who had not understood one word in ten. "I ask what you do here alone? Caroline and Mr. Cray can come home, I suppose, without your waiting for them in this public manner. What would your papa say if he saw you?"

"Papa has seen me," replied Sara. "Papa has just come up to the station and is gone down with the engine."

"Gone down with what engine? What do you mean?"

Sara put her lips close to Miss Davenal's ear. "Papa's gone down the line with some more gentlemen, to see about the wounded."

"Wounded!" shrieked Miss Bettina. "Has there been an accident? Who's wounded? Caroline and Mr. Cray?"

"We don't know yet, aunt." And in the best way that she could, Sara strove to make the case comprehensible to her aunt. Miss Davenal understood at last, and was somewhat mollified.

"Sara, I am not very angry with you now. I might have stopped myself. An accident to the train, and the doctors gone down! Oh! those dreadful railways!"

A little longer of suspense, and then the passengers began to arrive. After the shock and fright, it had seemed safer to many of them to walk the three miles of distance than to trust to the rail again and another engine. The path fields were dry, and it was a pleasant walk by moonlight. Miss Bettina,

whose eyes were as quick as her hearing was dull, was the first to recognise Mrs. Cray amidst them.

Caroline burst into tears as they laid hold of her, and Sara's heart began to sink. But the tears were only the effect of the fright and excitement she had gone through. She could give no clear account of the accident or what it had brought forth. All she knew was that there was great banging and bumping of the carriage she was in, but it was not overturned. Two other carriages were; and the engine was lying on its side with all its steam coming out of it. She scrambled up the bank in her terror, as did most of the passengers, and came on with them.

"And Mark?" asked Sara, scarcely daring to put the question.

"Mark! He stayed to look after the wounded," was her reply. "He said he thought there was nobody seriously hurt. At any rate, there are no lives lost."

Sara's heart breathed a word of thankfulness. "Did you see Lady Oswald?" she asked. "She went to Hildon this afternoon, and Mr. Oswald Cray thought she must be in this train, returning."

"I did not see her," replied Mrs. Cray. "Lady Oswald in the train! I thought she never travelled by rail."

"She did this afternoon. One of her carriage-horses is ill. How thankful! — how thankful we must all be that it is no worse!" concluded Sara Davenal.

"Well, this is a fine ending to your wedding jaunt!" exclaimed Miss Bettina. "What about your luggage, Caroline? Is it safe?"

"As if we gave a thought to our luggage, Aunt Bettina! When people's lives are at stake they can't think of their luggage."

"Nor care either, perhaps," sharply answered Miss Bettina,

who, for a wonder, had caught the words. "It may be lying soused in the engine-water, for all you know!"

"I daresay it is," equably returned Caroline. "It was in the van next the engine."

But the full report had to come up yet; and the excited crowd stopped on.

CHAPTER XIII.

Pain.

CLEAR and distinct lay the lines of rail in the cold moonlight. It was a straight bit of line there, without curve or bend, rise or incline; and why the engine should have gone off the rails remained to be proved. It was lying on its side, the steam escaping as from a fizzing, hissing furnace; the luggage-van was overturned, and its contents were scattered; and two carriages were overturned also: a second-class which had been next the van, a first-class which had followed it.

But now, as good Providence willed it, in that second-class carriage there had only been three passengers. The train was not a crowded one, and people don't go close to the engine as a matter of taste. Of these three passengers, two had thrown themselves flat on the floor of the carriage between the seats, and escaped without injury; the other had a broken arm and a bruised head, not of much moment. The first-class carriage was more fully occupied, and several of the passengers, though not fatally or even extensively, were seriously hurt; and of the driver and stoker, the one had saved himself by leaping from his engine, the other was flung to a distance and lay there as he fell.

Mark Cray, as you have heard, remained to tend the wounded. The first face he distinguished in the moonlight,

lying amidst the débris of the overturned first-class carriage, was that of Lady Oswald: and so completely astonished was he to see it, that he thought either his eyes or the moon must be playing him false. He and Caroline had been in a carriage almost at the back of the train, consequently he had not seen her at the Hildon station: and he had believed that Lady Oswald, of all persons, would have been the last to attempt railway travelling, so much was she averse to rails and trains in general. Groaning and moaning by her side was Parkins; and Mr. Cray could doubt no longer.

With assistance, the passengers were extricated and laid upon the bank. Their injuries were unequal; some, after the first shock, could walk and talk, some could do neither; while the first grumbled and complained of their bruises and abrasions, the last lay still, except for groaning. The only perfectly quiet one was Lady Oswald: she lay with her pale face upturned to the moonlight, her eyes closed. It was natural perhaps that Mark Cray should turn his first attention to her. A gentleman, one of the passengers, asked if she was dead.

"No," said Mark; "she has only fainted. Parkins, suppose you get up and try if you can walk. I'm sure you can't be hurt if you are able to make that noise. That engine appears not to be over steady. Take care it does not raise itself again and come puffing off this way."

Parkins, not detecting the *ruse*, started up with a shriek, and stood rubbing herself all over. "I think I'm killed," she cried; "I don't believe I have got a whole bone in me."

"I'll see by-and-by," said Mr. Cray. "Meanwhile come and help your lady. I want her bonnet and cap untied."

Parkins limped to the spot stiffly with many groans, but wonderfully well considering the belief she had just expressed. At the same moment, some one came up with water,

procured from a pond in the field, and the driver, who had just come to *his* legs, brought a lamp. The lamp was held to Lady Oswald's face, and some of the water poured into her mouth. Between the two she opened her eyes.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Where am I?"

"She's all right," whispered Mr. Cray, his warm tone proving that he had not previously felt so assured of the fact. "Has anybody got a drop of brandy?" he called out to the passengers, who yet stayed at the scene.

"Goodness me! where am I?" cried Lady Oswald, with a faint shriek. "Parkins, is that you? What has happened? Didn't we get into the railway carriage?"

"But we are out of it now, my lady," cried Parkins, sobbing. "There has been an awful upset, my lady, and I don't know anything more, except that it's a mercy we are alive."

"An upset!" repeated Lady Oswald, who appeared to have no recollection whatever of the circumstances. "Is anybody hurt? Are you hurt, Parkins?"

"Every bone in me is broke, my lady, if I may judge by the feel of 'em. This comes of them sheds."

"Be quiet, Parkins," said Mr. Cray, who had succeeded in finding a wicker-cased bottle containing some brandy-and-water. "Help me to raise your lady a little."

Parkins contrived to give her help in spite of the damaged bones, but the moment Lady Oswald was touched she shrieked out terribly.

"Let me alone! let me alone! Is that Mark Cray? How kind you are to come to see after me, Mr. Cray? Did you come from Hallingham?"

"We were in the same train, Lady Oswald; I and Caroline. I am very glad that it happened to be so."

"To be sure; I begin to remember: you were to return to-night. I — I feel very faint."

Mark succeeded in getting her to drink some brandy-and-water, but she positively refused to be touched, though she said she was in no pain. He thought she was exhausted, the effect of the shock, and left her to attend to other sufferers, who perhaps wanted his aid more than Lady Oswald.

Then, after awhile, the carriage came up, bringing the help from Hallingham. Mark Cray saw Dr. Davenal with the greatest pleasure, and he took him at once towards Lady Oswald.

"Are many hurt?" inquired the doctor.

"Astonishingly few," was the reply; "and the hurts are of a very minor character, I fancy. A broken arm is about the worst."

"And what of Lady Oswald?"

"I don't think she's hurt at all: she's suffering from the shock. A little exhausted; but that's natural."

"To a woman of her age such a shock is no light thing, Mark. However, we must do the best we can for everybody."

"There has been enough groaning — if that's anything to judge by," said Mark; "groaning and complaining too."

"Glad to hear it," said the doctor. "When people can complain, the damage is not very extensive."

"Parkins, for one, keeps protesting that every bone's broken. But she ran out of the way pretty quickly when I told her the engine might start up again."

The doctor smiled, and they came up to Lady Oswald. Oswald Cray had found her out, and was sitting on the bank beside her. She spoke just a word or two to him, but seemed, as Mr. Cray had said, exhausted. Oswald Cray rose to

resign his place to Dr. Davenal, and he took his brother aside.

"Is she much hurt, Mark?"

"O no," replied Mark. "It has shaken her, of course; but she has been talking as fast as I can."

He spoke with singular confidence. In the first place, Mark Cray was naturally inclined to look on the bright side of things, to feel confident himself in the absence of any palpable ground for doing so; in the second, he did not think it at all mattered what information on the point was given to Oswald.

Reassured upon the score of Lady Oswald, Oswald quitted Mark, and went amidst the wounded. Proud man though he was accused of being, though he *was*, never was there a tenderer heart, a softer hand, a gentler voice for the sick and suffering, than his. All the patients appeared to have been attended to in some degree; and they were in good hands now. Oswald halted by the side of the poor stoker, a swarthy, honest-faced man, who was moaning out his pain.

"What, is it you, Bigg?" he said, recognising the man. "I did not know you were back on this part of the line again."

"I on'y come on it yesterday, sir. It's just my luck."

"Where are you hurt?"

"I be scalded awful, sir. I never knew what pain was afore to-night. All my lower limbs is" —

"Take care!" shouted Oswald to a stupid fellow who was running along with a plank in his arms. "Can't you see there's a man lying here? What are you about?"

"About my work," was the rough reply, spoken in an insolent tone. It was one of the men just brought down, a workman from Hallingham station, and Oswald knew him well.

"What is that, Wells?" he quietly asked.

Wells looked round now, surprised at being addressed by name. He pretty nearly dropped his load in consternation when he recognised Mr. Oswald Cray. Full as his hands were, he managed to jerk his hat from his head.

"I beg your pardon I'm sure, sir. I thought it was nothing but some idler obstructing of me. One does get beset with idlers at these times, asking one all sorts of questions. I shouldn't have answered that way, sir, if I'd knowed it was you."

"Go on with your work; there's no time to talk. And don't blunder along again without looking where you are going."

"One can't see well in the dark, sir."

"It's not dark; it is as light as it need be. Quite light enough for you to see your way. Do you call that bright moon nothing?"

"He'd ha' been right over my legs, but for you, sir," murmured poor Bigg, the great drops of pain standing out on his brow, black with his occupation. "I don't know how I be to bear this agony. That cursed engine" —

"Hush, Bigg," interrupted Mr. Oswald Cray.

Bigg groaned his contrition. "Heaven forgive me! I know it ain't a right word for me to-night."

"Heaven will help you to bear the pain if you will only let it," said Oswald. "There has been worse pain to bear than even yours, my poor fellow; though I know how hard it is for you now to think so."

"It may be my death-blow, sir. And what's to become o' my wife and little uns? Who'll work for 'em?"

"No, no, Bigg. I hope it is not so bad as that. I do not think it is."

"If one might count by pain, sir" —

"Bigg, I can give you a little comfort on that score," interrupted Oswald Cray. "A friend of mine was very dreadfully burnt, through his bed-clothes catching fire. Awfully burnt: I don't like, even at this distance of time, to think of it. The next day I heard of it and went to see him. I am not a very good one to witness physical pain, and I remember how I dreaded to witness his, and the spectacle I did not doubt he presented. He *was* a spectacle, poor fellow — but let that pass. To my great astonishment he saluted me heartily as I went in. 'Holloa, old friend!' were his words, not only cheerfully but merrily spoken. I found that he did not suffer pain: had not felt any from the moment he was burnt. In my ignorance, I set that down as a most favourable symptom, and felt sure he would get well shortly. When I was leaving him, I met the doctor going in, and said how glad I was to find his patient so well. 'Well!' he exclaimed, 'why, what do you judge by?' And I said — by his feeling no pain. 'That's just it,' the doctor observed: 'if he only felt pain there might be a chance for him. I wish I could hear him roar out with it.' Now, Bigg," Mr. Oswald Cray added, "I am no surgeon, but I infer that the same theory must hold good in scalds as in burns: that your pain is as favourable a symptom as his want of it was unfavourable. Do not *rebel* at your pain again, my poor fellow; rather bear it like a man. Were I scalded or burnt, I think I should be *thankful* for the pain."

"He was burnt worse, may be, nor me, that there gentleman," remarked Bigg, who had listened with interest.

"Ten times worse," replied Oswald. "Yes, I may say ten times worse," he emphatically repeated. "Indeed, Bigg, I feel sure that yours is but a very slight hurt, in comparison with what it might have been: and I do not say this

to you in the half-false light in which one speaks to a child to soothe it, but as one truthful man would speak to another."

"God bless you, sir. My heart was a-failing of me sadly. Did he die, that there gentleman?"

"He died at a week's end: but there had been no hope of him from the first; and there were also certain attendant circumstances in his case, apart from the injury, remarkably unfavourable. In a short while, Bigg, you'll be on your legs again, as good a man as ever. I'll ask Dr. Davenal to come and have a look at you."

The name of the far-famed surgeon carried assurance in itself, and Bigg's face lighted up with eagerness. "Is Dr. Davenal here, sir?"

"Yes. I'll go and look for him."

At the moment that Oswald spoke, Dr. Davenal had left Lady Oswald and encountered Mr. Cray. The latter, whose spirits were rather exalted that night, the effect probably of finding the injuries around him so slight, when he had looked out for all the terrible calamities that flesh is heir to, not to speak of death, stopped to speak to him of Lady Oswald. And he spoke lightly.

"Well? You don't find her hurt, doctor?"

"I'll tell you more about it to-morrow, Mark."

Dr. Davenal's tone was so very grave that Mark Cray stared. He thought — Mark Cray almost thought that there was a shade of reproof in it, meant for him.

"I am sure she has no serious hurt," he exclaimed.

"Well, Mark, I can say nothing positively yet. In the state she is, and in this place, it is not easy to ascertain: but *I fear she has.*"

"My goodness!" cried Mark, conscious that he was but the veriest tyro beside that man of skill, of unerring practice,

Richard Davenal, and feeling very little at the moment. "What is the hurt, sir?" he asked in a loud tone.

"Hold your tongue about it," said the doctor. "Time enough to proclaim it abroad when the fact has been ascertained that there is one."

Oswald Cray came up, having distinguished the doctor in the moonlight.

"I wish you'd come and look at a poor fellow, Dr. Davenal, who wants a word of cheering. A word of such from you, you know, sends the spirits up. You should have seen the man's face lighten when I said you were here."

"Who is it?" asked the doctor, turning off with alacrity.

"Poor Bigg the fireman. You know him, I dare say. He is badly scalded and bruised."

"Oh, his hurts are nothing," slightly spoke Mark Cray. "He seems just one of those groaners who cry out at a touch of pain."

"Mark," said the doctor, stopping, "allow me to tender you a word of advice — do not fall into that, by some, professed to be entertained idea, that nobody can, or ought, to feel pain; or, if they feel it, that they ought not to show it. It is unnatural, untruthful; and to my mind, particularly unbecoming in a medical man. Pain to some natures is all but an impossibility to bear; it is all that can be imagined of agony; it is as if every moment of its endurance were that of death. The nervous organisation is so sensitively delicate, that even a touch of pain, as you express it, which most people would scarcely feel, would certainly not cry out over, is to them the acutest suffering. As a surgeon and anatomist you ought to know this."

"He's only a fireman," returned Mark. "Nobody expects those rough fellows to be sensitive to pain."

"Let him be a fireman or a waterman, he will feel it as I

describe, be his frame thus sensitively organised," was the reply of Dr. Davenal, spoken firmly, if not sternly. "What has a man's condition in life to do with it? It won't change his physical nature. A duke sleeping on a bed of down, nurtured in refinement and luxury, may be so constituted that pain will be a mere flea-bite to him; should he be destined to endure the worst that's known to earth, he will, so to say, hardly feel it: whereas this poor fireman, inured to hard usage, to labour and privation, may be literally almost unable to bear it. For my own part, when I have to witness this distressing sensibility to pain, perhaps have to inflict it as a surgical necessity, I suffer half as much as the patient does, for I know what it is for him. Don't affect to ridicule pain again, Mark."

Mark Cray looked vexed, annoyed. But every syllable that had fallen from Dr. Davenal's lips had found its echo in the heart of Oswald Cray. If there was one quality he admired beyond all else, it was sincere open truthfulness: and to Oswald's mind there was an affectation, a want of sincerity, in the mocking expressions, the shallow opinions, so much in fashion in the present day. There had been a hollow carelessness in Mark's tone when he ridiculed the notion of the poor stoker's possessing a sensitiveness to pain, just as if the man had no *right* to possess it.

"Well, Bigg, and so you must get tossed in this upset!" began the doctor cheerily. "Oh! you'll do well, by the look of your face; we shall soon have you on the engine again. Let's get a sight of this grand damage. Who has got a lantern?"

It was a bad scald; a shocking scald; there was no question of it; and there was much injury by bruises; but Dr. Davenal spoke the simple truth when he assured the man that the hurts were not dangerous.

"Keep up your heart, Bigg. In an hour's time you will be in the infirmary, properly attended to. You'll soon get over this."

"I dun know as I can live through the pain, sir," was the wailing answer.

"Ay, it's bad. But when we have got the proper remedies on, you won't feel it as you do now. Bigg, I once scalded my leg badly — at least somebody did it for me — and I remember the pain to this day; so, my poor fellow, I can tell what yours is."

"Mr. Cray said, sir, I oughtn't to feel no pain from a hurt like this, he did. It sounded hard like, for the pain is awful."

"Mr. Cray knows you would be better if you tried not to feel the pain, not to feel it so acutely. He is a doctor, you know, Bigg, and sees worse hurts than yours every day of his life."

"I'd like to ask you, sir, when I shall be well — if you can tell me. I have got a wife and children, sir; and she's sick just now, and can't work for 'em."

"We'll get you up again in three weeks," said Dr. Davenal cheerily, as he hastened away to another sufferer, groaning at a distance.

The term seemed long to the man: almost to startle him: he was thinking of his helpless wife and children.

"Three weeks!" he repeated with a moan. "Three weeks, and nobody to help 'em, and me laid down incapable!"

"Think how much worse it might be, Bigg!" said Mr. Oswald Cray, wishing to get the man to look at his misfortune in a more cheerful spirit. "Suppose Dr. Davenal had said three months?"

"Then, as good he'd said, sir, as I should never be up again."

"Do you think so? I don't. It is a long while to be confined by illness, three months, and to you it seems, no doubt, very long indeed; but it is not so much out of a man's life. I knew one who was ill for three years, and got up again. That would be worse, Bigg."

"Ay, sir, it would be. I haven't got just my right thoughts to-night, what with the pain that's racking me, and what with trouble about my wife and little 'uns."

"Don't *trouble* about them, Bigg," was the considerate answer. "They shall be taken care of until you can work for them again. If the company don't do it, I will."

A short while longer of confusion, of hasty clearance of the line, of soothing medical aid, — such aid as could be given in that inconvenient spot, where there was only the open bare ground for the sufferers to lie on, the moonlit sky to cover them, — and the return to Hallingham was organised. The injured were lifted into the carriages and placed as well as circumstances permitted. Lady Oswald, who shrieked out much when they raised her, was laid at full length on a pile of rugs collected from the first-class compartments, and the engine started with its load, and steamed gently onwards.

It appeared afterwards that the accident had been caused by the snapping of some part of the machinery of the engine. It was a very unusual occurrence, and could neither have been foreseen nor prevented.

The expectant crowd had not dispersed when Hallingham was reached. Nay, it had considerably increased. Even Miss Bettina Davenal retained her post, and Sara and Caroline with were her.

The invalid train — it might surely be called one in a

double sense — came slowly into the station. The platform had been cleared; none were allowed upon it to obstruct the removal of the sufferers from the train to the conveyances that waited, in which they would be transported to their homes, or to the infirmary, as the case might be. But, if the platform was denied them, the excited watchers made up for the discourtesy by blocking up the road and doors outside — a motley group, picturesque enough in the fine moonlight night.

Dr. Davenal, Mr. Cray, and the other medical men were occupied in superintending the removal of their patients, but Mr. Oswald Cray found his way to Miss Davenal, and gave them the good news that the injuries were comparatively slight. A train for London was on the point of starting, and he was going by it. He contrived to obtain a few words with Sara, and she went with him on to the platform.

“I wish I could have remained over to-morrow,” he observed to her. “I should like to see and hear how all these poor people get on.”

“Are you sure you cannot remain?”

“I am sure that I ought not. You have heard me speak of Frank Allister, Sara?”

“Often. The young Scotchman who was with you at Bracknell and Street’s for so many years.”

“We were articled together. He has become very ill lately, and — and the firm has not behaved quite well to him. I have no voice in that part of its economy, or it should never have been.”

“What did they do?” inquired Sara.

“He has not got on as I have. Still he held a tolerably fair post in the house; but his health failed, and he had to absent himself. Mr. Street found out how ill he was, came to the conclusion that he’d be of no use to us again, and

wrote him his dismissal. I thought it very hard; and he — he” —

“Yes!” said Sara, eagerly interested.

“He found it harder than he could bear. It put the finishing stroke to his illness, and I don’t think he will rally. He has no relatives near, few friends, so I see him all I can, and I gave him a faithful promise to spend to-morrow with him. Time’s up, and the guard’s impatient, I see.”

“Does the guard know you are going?”

“Yes. Don’t you see him looking round for me? Fare you well, Sara. I may be down again in a day or two.”

He had taken her hands for a moment in both his as she stood before her.

“I trust you will get safe to town!” she whispered.

“Aye, indeed! This night has proved to us that safety lies not with ourselves. God bless you, my dearest!”

He crossed the platform and stepped into the carriage, which the guard was holding open. The next moment the train was steaming out of the station, Sara Davenal looking after it with a lingering look, a heart at rest, as that sweet word of endearment rang its echoes on her ear.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Whim of Lady Oswald’s.

THE medical body, as a whole, is differently estimated by the world. Some look down upon it, others look up to it; and their own position in the scale of society has no bearing or bias on the views of the estimators. It may be that a nobleman will bow to the worth and value of the physician, will regard him as a benefactor of mankind, exercising that calling of all others most important to the welfare of humanity; while a

man very far down in the world's social ladder will despise the doctor wherever he sees him.

It is possible that each has in a degree cause for this, so far as he judges by his own experience. The one may have been brought in contact with that perfect surgeon — and there are many such — whose peculiar gifts for the calling were bestowed upon him by the Divine will; he with the lion's heart and woman's hand, whose success, born of patience, courage, judgment, experience, has become by God's blessing an assured fact. Men who have brought all the grand discoveries of earthly science to their aid and help in their study of the art; who have watched Nature day by day, and mastered her intricacies; who have, in fact, attained to that perfection in skill which induces the involuntary remark to break from us — We shall never see his fellow! Before such a man as this, as I look upon it, the world should bow. We have no benefactor like unto him. The highest honours of the land should be open to him; all that we can give of respect and admiration should be his.

But there is a reverse side to the picture. There is the man who has gone into the profession without aptitude for it, who has made it his, although positively incapable of properly learning it and exercising it. He may have acquired the right to use all the empty distinguishing letters attaching to it, and tack them after his name on all convenient occasions, inscribe them in staring characters on his very doorposts — M.D., M.R.C.S. — as many more as there may be to get; but, for all that, he is not capable of exercising the art. His whole career is one terrible mistake. He kills more patients than he cures; slaying them, drenching them to death, with that most pitiful and fatal of all weapons — ignorance. It may not be his fault, in one sense: he does his best: but he has embraced a calling for which nature did not

fit him. He goes on in his career, it is true, and his poor patients suffer. More ignorant, of necessity, than he is — for in all that relates to the healing art, we are, take us as a whole, lamentably deficient — they can only blindly resign themselves to his hands, and when they find that there's no restored health for them, that they get worse rather than better, they blame the obstinacy of the malady, not the treatment. Upon his own mind, meanwhile, there rests an ever-perpetual sense of failure, irritating his temper, rendering his treatment experimental and uncertain. Some cannot see where the fault lies — have no conception that it is in their own incapacity. And if a man does see it, what then? He must go on and do his best; he must be a doctor always; it is his only means of living, and he is too old to take to another trade. Rely upon it there are more of these practitioners than the world suspects.

Such a man as the first was Dr. Davenal; such a man as the last was Mark Cray. But that Mark was so Dr. Davenal suspected not. Grave cases hitherto, during their short connection, had been treated by the doctor, and for ordinary ailments Mark did well enough. He could write a proper prescription when the liver was out of order, or bring a child through the measles; he could treat old ladies with fanciful ailments to the very acme of perfection. It is true Dr. Davenal had been once or twice rather surprised by downright wrong treatment on the part of Mark, but he had attributed it to inexperience.

When other doctors could not cure, people flew to Dr. Davenal; when there was a critical operation to be performed, involving life or death, Dr. Davenal was prayed to undertake it. His practice consequently was of wide extent; it was not confined to Hallingham and its vicinity, but extended occasionally to the confines of the county. It was not,

therefore, surprising that on the morning following the accident Dr. Davenal found himself called out at an early hour to the country on a case of dangerous emergency. And the illness was at Thorndyke.

He responded at once to the call. Never a prompter man than Richard Davenal. Roger had learnt by example to be prompt also, and was ready with his carriage as soon as his master. The arrangements with regard to saving time were well organised at Dr. Davenal's. The bell, communicating from the house down the side-wall of the garden to the man's rooms near the stables, was made the means of conveying different orders. If rung once, Roger was wanted in-doors to receive his orders by word of mouth; if rung twice — and on those occasions they were always sharp, imperative peals — Roger knew that the carriage was wanted at once, with all the speed that he could get it round.

The calm peaceful quiet of the Sabbath morn was lying on the streets of Hallingham as the doctor was driven through them. The shops were all shut; some of the private houses were not yet opened — servants are apt to lie late on Sunday morning. As they passed the town-hall and the market-place, so void of life then, the church clocks struck eight, and the customary bells, giving token of the future services of the day, broke forth in the clear air.

“Stop at the abbey, Roger,” said the doctor, as they neared it.

The woman, Dorcas, was just opening the parlour shutters. She came to the door when she saw the carriage drawing up to it.

“I want to see your master, Dorcas. I suppose he's up.”

“He is up and out, sir,” was her reply. “He has been gone about five minutes.”

This answer caused the doctor to pause. It should be ex-

plained that when the train of sufferers arrived at the station the previous night, Lady Oswald had elected to be accompanied to her home by Mark Cray, not by Dr. Davenal. Whether she was actuated by pure caprice; whether by a better motive — the belief that she was not hurt so much as some other of the sufferers, and that Dr. Davenal's skill would be more needed by them; or whether the recent sudden liking she had taken for Mr. Cray swayed her then, could not be told; never would be told. She seemed to be a little revived at the end of the journey, and she chose that Mark Cray should go home with her. Dr. Davenal had acquiesced, but he whispered a parting word to Mark. "If there is an injury, I suspect it will be found in the ribs, Mark. Look well to it. If you want me, I am going on to the infirmary, and shall be at home afterwards."

But, as it appeared, the doctor had not been wanted. At any rate, Mark Cray had not sent for him. And he had stopped now to hear, if he could, Mark's report.

An upper window opened, and Mrs. Cray, completely enveloped in a thick shawl, so that nothing could be seen of her but the tip of her nose, leaned out.

"Good-morning, Uncle Richard."

"Good-morning, my dear. I am glad to see you again. Can you come down for a minute?"

"No, I have not begun to dress. Did you want Mark? He has gone to Lady Oswald's."

"Ah, that's what I wish to ask about. Did you hear Mark say how she was? — whether there was any hurt?"

"He said there was not. But, for one thing, she kept fainting, and refused to be touched. At least, I think he said so, something of that; I was very sleepy when he got home; it was one o'clock. I am sure he said she was not hurt to speak of."

"That's all right then," said Dr. Davenal.

"You are out betimes, Uncle Richard," resumed Caroline. "Are you going far?"

"To Thorndyke. Tell your husband he must see my patients this morning, I shall not be back in time. Drive on, Roger."

"Very well," said Caroline. "Who's ill at Thorndyke?"

But Dr. Davenal's answer, if he gave one, was lost in the distance, and never reached Caroline's ear.

It was a singular coincidence — as was said by gossips afterwards — that one should be taken ill that day at Thorndyke and be in danger of death. It was not, however, one of the Oswald family, but a visitor of Sir Philip's, and it has nothing whatever to do with the story. It need not have been mentioned, save to explain what took Dr. Davenal from Hallingham on that critical day.

Dr. Davenal found the patient alarmingly ill, in great need of medical help, and he had to remain at Thorndyke some hours. It was between two and three o'clock when he got back to Hallingham, and he ordered Roger to drive at once to the infirmary.

The doctor went in and saw his patients. The poor man, Bigg, easier now than he had been the previous night, lay in a slumber: the rest were going on well. One woman had gone. An inmate of the wards for some weeks past, her case, a very painful one, had baffled all skill, all remedy; and she had gone to that better place where sickness and pain cannot enter. Dr. Davenal stood for some little time conversing with the house-surgeon, and then departed on foot to his home: he had dismissed his carriage when he entered the infirmary.

As he was walking, he met an eager little fellow scuffling along, one who always walked very fast, with his head

pushed out, as if he were in a desperate hurry. It was one of the infirmary pupils, as they were called; young men gathering skill and experience to become in time surgeons themselves, who attended the infirmary with their masters. This one, Julius Wild, a youth of eighteen, was more particularly attached to the service of Mr. Cray, went round the wards with him as his dresser, and suchlike. No sooner did he see Dr. Davenal than his pace increased to a run, and he came up breathless.

"Oh, if you please, sir, Mr. Cray has been looking for you everywhere" —

"I have been to Thorndyke," interrupted the doctor.

"Yes, sir, but he thought you must have come back, and he sent me to about twenty places to inquire. There's something wrong with Lady Oswald, sir, and he wants to see you about it."

"What is it that's wrong?"

"Mr. Cray didn't explain to me, sir; but he said something about an operation. She's hurt internally, sir, I think."

"Where is Mr. Cray? Do you know?"

"He is gone to your house, sir. Somebody told him they saw your carriage going along, and Mr. Cray thought you might be at home. He" —

Dr. Davenal waited to hear no more. He made the best of his way towards home, but before he reached it he met Mark Cray.

There, in the street, particulars were explained by Mr. Cray to Dr. Davenal, not altogether to the doctor's satisfaction. It appeared that Mark — very carelessly, but he excused himself on the plea of Lady Oswald's fractious refusal to be touched — had omitted to make a proper examination of her state on the previous night. The delay, though not fatal,

was inexpedient, rendering the operation which must now be performed one of more difficulty than if it had been done at once; and Dr. Davenal spoke a few sharp words, the only sharp ones he had ever in his life spoken to Mark Cray.

"I told you it was my opinion there was some internal injury. You ought to have ascertained."

He turned his steps and proceeded at once and alone to the house of Lady Oswald. She was in a grievous state of suffering; and that she had not appeared so on the previous night could only be attributed to partial insensibility. Dr. Davenal examined into her hurts with his practised skill, his gentle fingers, and he imparted to her as soothingly as possible the fact that an operation was indispensable. "Not a very grave one," he said with a smile, intended to reassure. "Nothing formidable, like the taking off of an arm or a leg."

But Lady Oswald refused her consent; as fractiously and positively as she had the previous night refused to be touched. She would have no operation performed on her, she said, putting her to torture; they must cure her without it. Some time was lost in this unsatisfactory manner, and Mark Cray arrived while the contention was going on. Dr. Davenal was at length obliged to tell her a hard truth — that unless she submitted to it, her life must fall a sacrifice.

Then there came another phase of the obstinacy. When people are lying in the critical state that was Lady Oswald, hovering between life and death, it is surely unseemly to indulge in whims, in moods of childish caprice. If ever there is a time in the career of life that truth should reign pre-eminent, it is then: and these wilful caprices are born of a phase of feeling that surely cannot be called truth. Lady Oswald consented to the operation, but only on the condition that Mark Cray should perform it. What foolish caprice may

have prompted this, it is impossible to say. Mark had been talking to her, very much as he would talk to a child to induce it to have a tooth drawn or a cut finger dressed: protesting that it "would not hurt her to speak of," that it "would be over, so to say, in no time." Dr. Davenal, more honest, held his tongue upon those points: it would not be over in "no time," and he knew that it would hurt her very much indeed. This it may have been that caused the wretched whim to arise, that Mark Cray should be the acting surgeon. And she held to it.

It was necessary that she should be allowed some repose after the state of excitement to which she had put herself, and half-past five was the hour named. Dr. Davenal and Mark appointed to be with her then.

"Mark," asked the doctor, as they walked away together, "are you sure of yourself?"

Dr. Davenal had had no experience hitherto of Mark Cray's skill as a surgeon, except in common cases. All critical operations, both at the infirmary and in private practice, the doctor took himself. Mark looked at the doctor in surprise as he heard the question.

"Sure! Why, of course I am. It's quite a simple thing, this."

"Simple enough where the hand is experienced and sure," remarked the doctor. "Not so simple where it is not."

"Of course I have not had your experience, Dr. Davenal; but I have had quite sufficient to ensure my accomplishing this, perhaps as skilfully as you could."

Mark spoke in a resentful tone; he did not like the reflection that he thought was cast upon him by the question. Dr. Davenal said no more. He supposed Mark *was* sure of his hand's skill.

"I shall give her chloroform," resumed Mark.

"No!" burst forth Dr. Davenal. He could not have interrupted more impetuously had he been interposing to dash it from her lips. He believed that Lady Oswald would be a very unfit subject for chloroform: one of those few to whom it is not safe to administer it; and he explained this to Mark Cray.

Mark turned restive. Strange to say, he, who had hitherto been content to follow in the medical steps of Dr. Davenal, watching his treatment, pursuing the same, more as a pupil takes lessons of a master, than as a man in practice for himself, seemed inclined to turn restive now. Did Mark Cray, because he had married the doctor's niece, had become connected with him by private ties, was now a more equal partner, fully recognised — did he deem it well to exercise that right of independence which we all love, for it is inherent in the hearts of the best of us, and to stand up for his own ways and his own will?

"I like chloroform," he said. "I consider it one of the most blessed inventions of the age."

"Undoubtedly; where it can be safely used."

"I have used it fifty times," rejoined Mark.

"I have used it fifty and fifty to that," said the doctor, good-humouredly. "But, Mark, I never used it in my life upon a doubtful subject, and I never will use it upon one."

"What do you call a doubtful subject?"

"What do I call a doubtful subject?" repeated the doctor. "You know as well as I. How many patients has chloroform killed? Upon certain natures" ——

"Very few," interrupted Mark.

"Very few, as compared to the whole," acquiesced the doctor. "You may administer chloroform with perfect safety to ninety-nine patients, and you cannot to the hundredth. Upon certain natures, as I was about to observe, its effects

may be fatal. And where there is this doubt, Mark, it should be acted upon."

"The cases are so rare."

"True. And the important thing for a medical man, in these cases, is to discern where chloroform may be given with safety and where it may not."

"It is impossible that he can do that with any certainty."

"Not at all," said Dr. Davenal. "I never knew my judgment fail. I believe it is a gift, this ability to distinguish the subtle difference in natures. Perhaps I may call it instinct, more than judgment, for I think it could not deceive or lead me to an erroneous decision."

"I am not sure that I understand you," said Mr. Cray. "My belief is, that I possess nothing of the sort. I think you must be talking of a species of second sight."

"Then, Mark," was the half-joking answer, "allow yourself to be guided by my 'second sight.' To speak seriously," the doctor continued, in a graver tone, "I know that there are many practitioners, clever men, who do not possess this peculiar insight into nature. It is a great gift for those who do. It can never be acquired by practice; it must be inherent" —

"I suppose you think I don't possess it," interrupted Mark.

"I don't think you do. But for one of us who possesses it, numbers don't; so it is no disparagement to you to say so. To return to the question: Lady Oswald, in my opinion, would prove an unsafe subject for chloroform."

"She will make so much of the pain."

"Better that she should make much of it — ay, and feel it — than that any risk should be run. I cannot allow chloroform to be given to Lady Oswald."

Mark Cray demurred: not outwardly, for he said not another word; but inwardly. He was of that class of men

who disbelieve what they cannot see. Some of us will look into a man's face and read his character, read him for what he is, as surely and unerringly as we read the pages of a book; but others of us, who do not possess this gift, cannot believe that it exists, laugh at and ridicule the very idea of it. Just so was it with Mark Cray. That assertion of Dr. Davenal's, that some faculty or instinct within him enabled him to discern where chloroform might and might not be administered, was utterly scouted by Mark Cray. That subtle instinct into nature, that unerring, rapidly formed judgment of a sick man's state, the mental grasping instantaneously of the disease and its remedy, Mark Cray possessed not. To the very end of his life he would never learn it. Dr. Davenal said that out of numbers of medical men only one would possess it, and he was right. How many do not possess it, and go on to their career's end unconscious of their deficiency, they themselves will never know. Mark could see no reason why Lady Oswald should not be eased of her pain by the aid of chloroform; he did not for a moment believe the doctor could; he regarded it as a crotchet, and a very foolish one. But he suffered the question to rest, and supposed he must bow to the decision of his senior partner.

"Shall I call for you, Mark?" asked the doctor, as they separated. "I shall go up in the carriage."

"O no, thank you. I'd as soon walk. You intend to be present?"

"Of course I shall be," replied the doctor. "Lady Oswald is my patient, in point of fact — not yours, Mark."

"Then I need not ask Berry. I thought of asking him to be present."

"You can do just as you please about that. If you like him to look on at you, you can have him. Twenty-five minutes

after five, remember, punctual. You'll want the full daylight."

As they parted, a feeling was in Mark's heart that he would not have liked to confess to the other, and that perhaps he neither cared to encourage nor to dwell upon. He felt perfectly sure of his own skill, he was not nervous; nobody less so; and yet there was a half-reluctance in his mind to perform that operation in the presence of Dr. Davenal, the skilled and accomplished operator. Surely the reluctance could only spring from a latent doubt of whether he ought to make so sure of himself! A *latent* doubt; one not suffered to appear: down far in the depths of his heart it lay — so deep that perhaps Mark thought it was not there at all, that it was only fancy.

He had a great deal rather have had Berry with him — *that* he acknowledged openly enough to himself. Surgeon Berry was a man of fair average skill, superior to Mark in experience, and he and Mark were great friends. Did Mark fear that the presence of the more finished and perfect surgeon, with his critical eye, his practised judgment, would render him nervous — as a candidate for the Civil Service examinations will break down, simply because those searching eyes are on him? No, Mark Cray feared nothing of the sort; and he could not have told, had he been pressed, why he would have preferred the absence of Dr. Davenal. He had looked on many a time at the doctor in such cases: but that was a different thing.

His thoughts were interrupted by Julius Wild. The young man accosted him to inquire if there were any orders — whether he should be wanted.

"Yes," said Mr. Cray. "Lady Oswald's case is fixed for this afternoon. You be up there with the dressings and things."

"Very well, sir," replied the young man, feeling some surprise, for he was not in the habit of attending privately with Dr. Davenal. "Am I to go to Dr. Davenal's for them?"

"No. You can get them from the infirmary."

"The infirmary!" thought Julius Wild to himself. "Can *he* be going to take the operation?" — for Mr. Cray's surgical apparatus was kept at the infirmary. He did not ask: his professional master seemed unusually silent — not to say cross.

"What time?" he inquired of Mr. Cray.

"Be at Lady Oswald's a little before half-past——"

The blank above is put intentionally, for it cannot be told with certainty what hour was really said by Mr. Cray. In the discussions upon it that ensued afterwards, Julius Wild declared in the most positive manner that it was *six*. "A little before half-past six." Mr. Cray asserted, with equal pertinacity, that he had said five. "A little before half-past five." Which of the two was right it was impossible to ascertain. Mark Cray said he should not be likely to make the mistake: the time, half-past five, had been just fixed upon with Dr. Davenal, had been repeated by word of mouth, and he had never thought of the hour, six, at all. There was plausible reason in that, certainly. On the other hand, Julius Wild was known for a clear-headed, steady, accurate young man, and he protested he could stake his life upon his correctness in this instance. He said the thought crossed his mind, when Mr. Cray named it, that half-past six would be the dusk hour; and he rather wondered within himself that it should have been chosen.

However it may have been, the misapprehension did occur between them.

When Dr. Davenal entered his own home, dinner had been over some time. It was their custom to dine early on

Sunday: and the general rule was, by Dr. Davenal's wish, never to keep meals waiting for him. Neal admitted him, and then came for orders. Should he bring up the dinner?

"Not the dinner," said Dr. Davenal; "just a bit of something upon a plate. I am not hungry: I had a late breakfast at Thorndyke. Has anybody been here for me?"

"No, sir. I think Mr. Cray took your patients. He has been here" —

"I know all about that," interrupted the doctor.

He passed Neal, and went on to the garden-parlour, a favourite room of his daughter's. She was there alone, seated before the open glass doors. How peaceful it all looked! The green lawn stretching out in front, the bright hues of the autumn flowers, the calm purity of the dark blue sky lying in the stillness of the Day of Rest. Sara Davenal had that good Book upon her lap: but she was not then reading it. She had closed it in deep thought. Her sweet face was turned upwards, her eyes were filled with tears from the intensity of her gaze; it seemed that she was looking for something in the autumn sky. The extreme calm, the aspect of peace, struck forcibly on the senses of Dr. Davenal, and he remembered it in the days to come. It was the last day of peace for him; it was the last day of peace for Sara; henceforth the world was to change for both of them. Ere the morrow's sun should rise, a great care, a great trouble would be tugging at their heart-strings; a skeleton would be there to keep; a secret, that must be hidden for very safety's sake, would have taken up its abode there.

Dr. Davenal was upon her so quickly that she could not conceal her glistening eyes. She started up to welcome him, and laid down the book. Owing to that most attentive habit of Neal's, of being on the watch and opening the door before people could get to it, she had not heard him come home.

"O papa, is it you? You have been away a long while."

"Sit down," he said, pressing her into her chair again. "What's the grief, Sara?"

"No grief, papa. I was only thinking."

"What about? The accident last night?"

"O no, not that. I hear that everybody's going on quite well. I was thinking — I was wondering — somehow I often get thinking on these things on a Sunday, when I am sitting alone, and the sky seems so calm and near," she broke off.

"Well, what were you thinking?"

"I was wondering whether they who are gone can look down and see us — see me just as I sit here looking up — whether they can read my thoughts? We seem so divided, papa; you and I and Edward left; mamma and Richard, and the two little ones who were between me and Edward, gone."

"Divided for a short while only, child."

"Yes, I know. The only one I can remember well is Richard. I am beginning to lose almost all recollection of mamma. But Richard — papa, at times I seem to see him before me now!"

Dr. Davenal turned to the window and stood with his back to Sara, looking out. She repented having spoken of her brother; somehow the words had slipped out in the fulness of her thoughts. Rising, she stole her hand into Dr. Davenal's.

"I forgot, papa," she softly whispered.

"Forgot what, my child?" he asked. "Nay, it might be just as well if we all spoke more of Richard, instead of shunning his name. Silence will not bring him back to us."

"Ah no, it will not!"

"And when once griefs can be talked of, their sting becomes less poignant. Did the post bring any letters this morning?" the doctor added, after a pause.

"Not for you, papa. There was one — how could I forget to tell you? — there was one for me from Edward."

"And what does he say?"

"He has not been able to get leave yet. At least, from the tenor of his letter, I don't much think he has asked for it. He says there's a great deal to do; that the preparations are going on very quickly; but no orders have been received yet as to the day for embarking. As soon as they are issued he will let us know."

"But he means to come down?"

"O yes. He will be sure to come, he says, though it should be to arrive by one train and return by the next. He writes in great spirits, and asks me — in a joke you know, papa — if I will pack up my boxes and go out with him."

"He —— What is it, Neal? My dinner?"

"Yes, sir. It is served."

CHAPTER XV.

Mark Cray's Mistake.

EVENING came, and Lady Oswald's house was prepared for what was going to take place. Dr. Davenal arrived rather before the time appointed, Mr. Cray five minutes after it. Mr. Cray was in a heat, and had evidently come at much speed, conscious probably that the time had expired. Lady Oswald was in her bed-chamber when Mr. Cray came up, Dr. Davenal in the ante-chamber.

"Where's Wild?" exclaimed Mr. Cray, throwing his eyes round the room.

"I have not seen him," replied the doctor.

"It is very inattentive of him not to be here. I told him the hour. Have you seen her?" added Mr. Cray, in a whisper.

"Yes. She is all right. Are you ready?"

"No, I am not ready," replied Mr. Cray. "Wild is bringing up the dressings."

"I have everything with me," said Dr. Davenal. "I have brought all."

In the room with Lady Oswald was her maid, Parkins. And the very moment that Dr. Davenal set his eyes on Parkins's ashy pale face, he knew that she would be better out of the room than in it. He said something to the effect, but Lady Oswald evidently wished for her, and Parkins avowed her intention of being as brave as need be.

Time was being wasted. Marcus Cray, in a fidgety sort of manner, went down twice after his expected pupil. He opened the hall-door and stood there looking out for him; and he did this twice over, for no sooner did he get up stairs the first time than he went back again. Dr. Davenal could not exactly make him out. Mr. Wild was not required in any way; and a half doubt stole over Dr. Davenal whether Mark Cray could be wilfully prolonging the minutes, as people will put off things they do not care to enter upon, from nervousness, dislike, or other causes. And, though he threw the doubt from him as an absurd improbability, he began to wish again to be the operator.

"Cray, I had better take this."

Mark fired up, and spoke out at the top of his voice. He would prefer to take it himself, Dr. Davenal permitting him.

Spoke out so loud that he was heard by Lady Oswald. She interrupted the discussion—if discussion it might be called—and settled it. "It should be only done by Mr. Cray."

"Very well," said Dr. Davenal in a low tone to his partner. "Be it so. But why do you wait, Mark?"

"I want that fellow to be here."

"He is not required. We shall have Lady Oswald get exhausted."

And Mark Cray, seeing the wisdom of the plea, made no further delay.

You will not wish to be present at this operation, or to have its details transcribed. Hallingham did not know them for many a long day. But one or two things must be mentioned.

At the very instant of its commencement, when Mark Cray was bending over Lady Oswald, there came something falling forward to the ground and brushed against him. It was brave Parkins, gone down in a fainting fit. Lady Oswald became agitated; she shrieked out, and would have risen had it been in her power. Dr. Davenal moved round, and bore the senseless Parkins from the rooms.

He could not throw her down outside like a log. He had to call some of the household and tell them what to do with her. Then she began to start and kick in incipient convulsions: altogether it was three or four minutes before Dr. Davenal got back to the room. It seemed to be delay after delay, as if the operation was fated not to be begun that day.

The operation, however, was begun, he found. When he got back, Mark had plunged into it. Dr. Davenal stepped up to him, and stood overlooking him with his unerring eye; that eye which Mark had dreaded.

Was it in consequence of that, that Mark Cray lost — what shall we call it? — his presence of mind? — his surgical skill? A suppressed sound, half indignation, half dismay, escaped the lips of Dr. Davenal, and he pushed Mark aside with an authoritative hand and took his place. What could have taken Mark? — what ailed him? Lady Oswald was offering no opposition, for she lay perfectly still.

So still, so voiceless, that in the midst of his work it struck strangely on the senses of Dr. Davenal. He paused a moment

to regard her attentively, and then glanced at Mark, one single word only escaping him.

"Chloroform?"

"Yes," said Mark. "I judged it best."

It was all that passed. Whatever Dr. Davenal may have felt, he could express neither doubt nor remonstrance then. His whole attention had to be concentrated on the work he was performing. Mark stood by and watched, saying nothing.

At length it was over; admirably performed, as all operations were performed, undertaken by Dr. Davenal. But Lady Oswald still lay without sense or motion; and they could not arouse her.

"You must have given her a great deal," observed Dr. Davenal, who was still occupied.

Which Mark Cray did not attempt to deny. "She required it. The fall of that stupid woman excited her terribly. The first lot made no impression on her: she did not seem to inhale it."

"But — good heavens! you could not have waited long enough to see. Mark Cray, this is a mistake, and an awful one."

Mark made no reply. Mark was doing all in his power to undo his work and arouse Lady Oswald. But he could not. Dr. Davenal touched his shoulder, and spoke upon a different subject.

"You told me you were sure of yourself."

Mark scarcely knew what he answered. Something to the effect that he always had been sure, until now: but his words were very indistinct.

"What incapacity came over you? What was its cause?"

It was impossible for Mark Cray to deny that incapacity had attacked him; that Lady Oswald under his hands would

have been in the greatest danger. Its cause he could not account for: but that common expression, "losing all presence of mind," would best describe it as it really was, and as it had appeared to Dr. Davenal. The drops of sweat stood out on his brow now as large as peas.

"The woman's fall startled me," he attempted to say. "At such a moment it takes but little to unnerve a man."

"Then, if so, he is not fit for a surgeon," returned Dr. Davenal. "Mark Cray," he continued, gravely and firmly, but not unkindly, "you must never in my presence attempt a critical operation again. Recollect that."

Meanwhile their whole attention was being given to Lady Oswald; their best efforts exerted to arouse her from the effects of the chloroform. All in vain, all useless; it had done its work too effectually.

By degrees, the horror of the conviction, that she could not be aroused — never more would be aroused — came pressing upon them deeper and deeper. Mark Cray wiped his hot face, and felt that he would give all he was worth to recall that one act of his — the surreptitiously conveying the chloroform to the house, which he had himself so successfully accomplished, and regarded as a cause of self-congratulation. Why had he not attended to the experienced opinion of Dr. Davenal — that Lady Oswald was one of those upon whom chloroform was not unlikely to be fatal? That it would be fatal in this case, Mark felt as certain *now* as if the breath had actually passed for ever from her body. A horrible fear came over him, and he once more lost all calmness, all self-possession.

"Dr. Davenal, for the love of God, do not betray me! Do not let it go forth to the world as my wilful act — one you warned me against. It was a dreadful mistake. I shall carry

it about with me in my heart for ever; but do not betray me to the world!"

He had seized the doctor's hands, and was pressing them nervously in his. His troubled face gazed imploringly upwards; his wailing tone of repentance struck sadly on the ear. Dr. Davenal did not immediately speak, and Mark Cray resumed.

"For Caroline's sake," he entreated. "If this mistake becomes known in all its unhappy details, my professional doom is sealed. Never again, so long as I live, as you and I are together, will I attempt to act on my opinion in opposition to yours. Be merciful to us, Dr. Davenal, and, for her and my sake, conceal it from the condemning world!"

And Dr. Davenal yielded. Ever merciful, ever striving to act in accordance with those great precepts of love and mercy which One came down eighteen hundred years ago to teach, he yielded to the prayer of the unhappy and agitated man before him. His own partner; Caroline's husband — no, he could not, would not, bring upon him the obloquy of the world.

"I will keep the secret, Mark Cray. Be easy. You have my promise."

The unhappy tidings were made known to the household — that their mistress could not yet be aroused from the effect of the chloroform which had been administered with a view of saving her pain; and they came flocking in. She was not dead; but she was lying still and motionless: and the means for recalling life went on. Mark Cray continued his efforts when all hope was gone, trying every means, probable and improbable, in his madness. Had a battery been at hand he would have essayed galvanism.

Alas! they might as well have sought to arouse a stone statue. Never more would there be any arousing for poor

Lady Oswald in this world. Death was claiming her: uncompromising, not-to-be-denied death!

Parkins, considerably recovered from her own attack, but in a shaky and tearful state, had come into the room with the rest. Parkins seemed inclined to rebel at the state of things; to question everybody, to cast blame somewhere.

"Why should chloroform have been given to her?" she asked of Mr. Cray.

"It was given with a view to deaden the pain," was Mark's short answer.

"But, sir, the operation was all but begun, if not begun, when I — when I — fainted: and there had been no question then of giving her chloroform."

"No, and it was your fainting that did three parts of the mischief," savagely returned Mr. Cray, who felt it the greatest relief to be able to lay the blame upon somebody. "It put her into a most undesirable state of agitation. I should think you must have heard her shriek, in spite of your fainting fit."

The words, the angry tone, completely did for Parkins, and she subsided into tears again. A few minutes, and Dr. Davenal turned from the ill-fated lady to her servants standing there.

"It is all over. She is gone."

And the doctor looked at his watch, and found that only one poor hour had elapsed since he had entered the house to perform that operation which had altogether terminated so fatally.

CHAPTER XVI.

Neal's Dismay.

DR. DAVENAL and Mr. Cray went forth together. Outside the hall-door stood Julius Wild. It now wanted twenty minutes to seven. The infirmity pupil had arrived a quarter of an hour before, and had waited patiently ever since to be let in. He had rung the bell in vain. In the confusion and distress of the house, it had, perhaps, not been heard, certainly had not been attended to. His rings had been but gentle ones: Julius Wild knew better than to make a noise at a house when illness was inside it: and he waited patiently enough, wondering whether the servants were asleep, whether Lady Oswald was worse, and believing the doctors had not yet come.

When they came forth, he was excessively surprised, marvelling greatly at his non-admittance.

"I have been ringing this quarter of an hour," he said, by way of explanation and apology. "I can't think what the servants can have been about."

"What have *you* been about?" thundered Mark Cray, giving way to anger, although he had come straight from the presence of the dead.

Mr. Wild was astonished. "I say, sir, I have been waiting here. I have been here this quarter of an hour, and could not get let in."

"And, pray, what kept you? Why were you not here to time?"

"I was here to time, sir," was the deprecating answer; and the young man marvelled much what had so put out his good-tempered medical master. "You told me to be here a little before half-past six, sir, and I got here five minutes before it."

Then began that dispute which was never satisfactorily settled; each, to this very day, believing himself to be in the right. Mr. Cray held to it that he had told him half-past five; Julius Wild earnestly protested that he had said half-past six. The wrangling continued for some minutes, or rather the difference of opinion, for of course the pupil did not presume to wrangle with his superior. A few sharp words from Mark, peremptorily ordering him to hold his tongue, concluded it.

The young man walked close by the two doctors, just a little behind them — for they had been walking down from Lady Oswald's all along, had not stayed for one minute at the door. He had wondered at first whether the operation had taken place, and why they should leave the house just about the time fixed for it: now that he heard of this misapprehension with regard to the hour, he supposed it was over, and that Mr. Cray's vexation arose from the fact of his not having arrived for it. But he was a young man of curiosity, fond of sociability in a general way and of asking questions, so he thought he would ask one now, and make sure.

"Is the operation over, sir?"

"Yes," curtly answered Mark.

"Was it successful?"

"When did you ever know Dr. Davenal unsuccessful?" retorted Mr. Cray. "*That* was successful enough."

It never occurred to Julius Wild that the stress upon the word "*that*" implied, or could imply, that though the operation had been successful, something else was not. Perhaps it was half a subterfuge in Mark Cray to have said it. The young man asked no more questions. Finding himself so snubbed, he desisted, and walked behind in silence. Neither of them told the unhappy truth to him. Dr. Davenal may have been too pained, too shocked to speak; Mark Cray's conscience too

suggestive. Nay, Dr. Davenal may not have seen his way clear to speak at all. If he was to conceal the culpability of Mark Cray, the less he opened his mouth upon the point, even by a word, the better.

Suddenly Mark turned round. "You are not wanted, Mr. Wild. There's nothing more to-night."

The young man took the hint at once, wished them good-evening, and walked off to the infirmary, there to leave certain articles that he had been carrying. He observed that Dr. Davenal, usually so courteous, never answered him, never gave him the good-evening in reply to his.

The two surgeons walked on in silence. The streets were nearly deserted; and the sound of praise and prayer came upon their ears from the lighted places of worship as they passed them. The evening was a warm one, and the doors of the churches and chapels stood open. They never spoke a word one to the other. Mark Cray felt as he had probably never felt in his life — ashamed, repentant, grieved, humble. He was guilty of the blood of a fellow-creature. *He* called it a "mistake." A mistake in one sense it undoubtedly was, but a wicked and a wilful one. Dr. Davenal felt it to be both: felt that the giving of the chloroform stealthily, in direct opposition to his expressed opinion, deserved a worse name: and, though he had promised not to betray Mark, he could not just yet subdue his own feelings, and speak to him in a friendly tone. Thus in silence they reached the doctor's gate.

"Good-night," said he, turning in at it.

"Good-night," replied Mark, continuing his way. But — and he felt it — there had been no invitation to him to enter, no pleasant look, no shake of the hand.

Neal was at the door, airing himself and watching the scanty passers-by in the dusky street, the rest of the household being at church. Dr. Davenal went into his study, and lifted

his hat from his brow as if a heavy weight were there. He had no light, save what came in from the street gas-lamp.

He leaned against the window in thought. Two hours before, Lady Oswald had been, so to say, as full of life as he was, and now — dead. Killed. There was no mincing the matter to himself; she had been killed. Killed by Mark Cray.

Had he done right in undertaking to screen Mark? — to keep his culpability a secret? — to suffer the world to assume his innocence? The reader may deem it a grave question: Dr. Davenal was asking it of himself. Had Mark's been purely an error in judgment; had he administered the chloroform, believing it to be the right and proper thing to do, leaving the issue with God, it had been different. But he had given it in direct opposition to an opinion of more value than his own; in, as was much to be feared, a spirit of obstinate defiance. It is true he had not intended to kill; he had probably been overconfident of the result. How Dr. Davenal condemned him, he alone could tell; but — was it his, the doctor's place, to hold him forth to the condemnation of the world? No; he, the merciful man, thought it could not be. One strong point on the side of this mercy was — that the proclaiming the facts could be productive of no good result; they could not recall the mistaken act; they could not bring the unfortunate lady back to life. It might be said that it should be made known as a warning to others not to trust Mark Cray; but the very occurrence itself with its tragical end, would, if the doctor knew anything of human nature, be its own warning for Mark Cray's whole lifetime. He did not think much of the surgical failure; at least he was not dwelling on it. Probably the worse calamity had in a measure eclipsed the other in his mind. Young surgeons had turned nervous before now, as Dr. Davenal knew; and the fall of the

maid, Parkins, might certainly have startled him. It was not that that was troubling him; he had arrested Mark's shaking hands, and replaced them with his own sure ones, and carried the matter through successfully; it was the other.

He thought it over and over, and could not bring himself to see that he had done wrong in promising to hide the facts. If he went that hour and stood in the market-place and shouted them forth to all hearers, it could not bring back the forfeited life; it could not remedy the past in the remotest degree. He thought of his dead brother, Caroline's father; he remembered the words he had sent out to him to soothe his dying bed — "The child shall be to me as a daughter." He could not, on the very threshold of her wedded life, bring obloquy on the husband of her choice, and blight his good name, his fair prospects. And so *he resolved to keep the secret* — to guard the fatal mistake from the knowledge of the world. Only their own two selves were privy to it, therefore Mark was perfectly safe, save for him. The administering the chloroform must be looked upon as an error in judgment, of his own as well as of Mark's: and yet scarcely an error, for perhaps nine surgeons out of ten would so have administered it to a patient under similar circumstances, and have made no exception in Lady Oswald. He, Dr. Davenal, must suffer this to be assumed, saying himself as little as was possible upon the matter to any one: in a case where the termination had been so unfortunate, his reticence would be excused.

He leaned his head upon his hand in the dark twilight, and pondered over the circumstances: he could not keep his mind from dwelling upon them almost morbidly. A strange fatality seemed to have attended the affair altogether. There had been the obstinate persistence of Lady Oswald to see her landlord, in spite of common sense and of Mr. Oswald Cray's

representation that it could not possibly serve her; there had been the sudden falling lame of the carriage horse, for which the coachman had been unable to account; and then there had been the accident to the train. Parkins had told him a confused tale-confused through her own grief, poor woman — of their having gone by mistake, she and her mistress, to the wrong side of the station at Hildon to take the return train, and had thereby lost a train. They went, naturally enough perhaps to inexperienced travellers, to the side of the platform on which they had descended on going; and it was not until a train came up to the other side, took in the passengers waiting on that side of the platform, and went on to Hallingham, that they discovered their mistake. But for that, they would have been at Hallingham safe and sound when the accident happened to the late train. Then there was the fact of Mark Cray's having been in the train, of his having been the first to see Lady Oswald. When brought afterwards to the home terminus, she had said, "Mr. Cray will go home with me:" and later she had insisted on his taking the operation. He himself had been called out to Thorndyke, had been kept there while the long hours of the best part of the day had flitted away: had he not been called out, why, the operation would, beyond all question, have been performed in the morning, probably by himself, for he should have seen her early and detected its need. There was the absence of the pupil, Julius Wild, through what appeared an unaccountable mistake: had that pupil been present, to him would have fallen the task of getting Parkins from the room, and the chloroform could not have been administered. A curious chapter of accidents — or what are called such — and Dr. Davenal lost himself in the chain of thought. "O merciful Father, forgive him! forgive him this night's work!" he murmured. "And mayst Thou have taken that poor woman to her rest!"

A great light and Neal's smooth voice broke upon Dr. Davenal. "Shall I get you anything, sir? Tea, or" —

"I don't want anything, I don't want the gas lighted," interrupted Dr. Davenal, starting from his chair. "Wait until you are called."

Neal, after a moment's stare, shot back again. It was not so much the sharp words, more imperative than any commonly used by his master, but the wailing tone of pain in which they were spoken, that struck Neal: nay, it almost seemed as if his entrance had brought a sort of terror to the doctor.

It was not terror. Neal was mistaken. But Dr. Davenal had been so completely buried in thoughts, not altogether of this world, that the abrupt interruption, with its commonplace excuse, had seemed to him singularly inopportune, causing him to wave away abruptly the man and his words.

He sat on in the dark again, and Neal took his place at the front door, and stood there looking out. Not a soul was in the house save himself and his master; and it may have seemed a more cheering way of passing the evening, to Neal, than to be shut up indoors.

It grew darker. Neal strolled along by the skirting shrubs of the garden, and took his stand at the front gate, ready to exchange courtesies with the people who would soon be going home from church or chapel. The moon did not give much light yet, but the night promised to be as clear and bright as the previous one had been.

"Holloa!" cried Neal, as a man he knew came up quickly. "You are in a hurry to-night."

"I have been out on business, Mr. Neal," replied the man, who was in fact an assistant to a carpenter and undertaker. "Our work can't always wait for the Sabbath to go by before it is seen to."

"Is anybody dead?" asked Neal.

"Lady Oswald. The message came down to us best part of an hour ago, so I've been up there."

It has been observed that Neal was too well trained a gentleman both in manners and nerves to express much surprise, but this answer caused him the very greatest shock. He was so startled as to take refuge in disbelief.

"*Lady Oswald*, did you say? But she's not dead!"

"But she is," replied the man. "I ought to know. I've just come from her."

"Why, what has she died of? They said the railway accident had not materially hurt her."

"She haven't died of the accident. She have died of that — that — what-you-call-it — as is give to folks to take the pain out of 'em."

Neal did not understand. "To take the pain out of them?" he repeated, looking questioningly at the speaker.

"That stuff that have come into fashion of late years. The doctors will give it you while you have a tooth took out, if you'll let 'em."

"Do you mean chloroform?"

"That's it. I never can remember the name. But I'd rather call it poison, for my part — killing folks dead off without a warning."

"Who gave it to Lady Oswald?"

"Your master," replied the man, lowering his voice to a whisper as he glanced at the windows of the house. "The servants was in the room with me up there, and they told me about it. There was something to be done to my lady, — some bones to be set, I believe, — and the doctors went this afternoon, and they give her this stuff, and it killed her. I wonder Parliament don't make a law again its use, for my part."

"I am sorry to hear this," exclaimed Neal. "My lady was very friendly to me."

"Ay. The servants be cut up like anything. And enough to make 'em! It's a shocking thing. The lady's maid says she can't think why they should have give her the stuff, for Mr. Cray himself told her, when he was there in the afternoon, that what they had to do wouldn't hurt my lady no more than a flea-bite. Any way, she's dead. But I can't stop here, I must get along back with the measure. Good-night, Mr. Neal."

"Good-night," replied Neal.

He leaned on the gate, watching the man hurrying onwards with his fleet steps, and thinking over what he had heard. Perhaps it is not too much to say that Mr. Neal would have preferred to hear of the death of any other person in Hallingham than of Lady Oswald's. Lady Oswald had been a great friend to him, and it had been Neal's intention to put her friendliness to the test in a very short period of time. Neal was a subtle schemer, and he had been perfecting a plan by which at one bold stroke Lady Oswald's mind should be disabused of that suspicion against himself imparted to her by Dr. Davenal the day of Miss Caroline's marriage, to which he had been an unsuspected listener, and by which he should also be effectually served. Neal had begun to feel that his tenure in his present situation was no longer sure, and he intended by the help of Lady Oswald to secure to himself a situation of a different nature.

Now this grand scheme was destroyed. As the rising waves dash away the "houses" built by children on the sands at the sea-shore, so this *château en Espagne* of Neal's was dashed down by the death of Lady Oswald. If Neal's cold and selfish heart could like any one, it had liked her. She had kept up friendly relations with Neal, as a former retainer

of Sir John and Thorndyke; had shown more consideration to Neal than to her own servants — had treated him in fact as superior to her servants. When Neal waited on her at her residence to pay his respects, as he did occasionally, she would ring the bell on his departure and say sharply, "Show Mr. Neal out" — as much as to remind her household that he had not been a common servant at Thorndyke: he was groom of the chambers. She had also been liberal in her presents to Neal. Altogether, Neal in his discomfiture felt very much as though her ladyship's death was a grievance personally inflicted on himself.

Jessy the housemaid was the first of the servants to return. The moment she entered, Neal took his hat and went up to Lady Oswald's with a view of learning particulars. The news had been so sudden, so unexpected, that some faint feeling or hope almost seemed to be in the man's mind that he should find it untrue.

He found it too true. He was allowed to see Lady Oswald, and he listened to the details given by the servants, gathering them into his mind to be turned over and examined afterwards. Parkins spoke with him privately. She was very bitter against the chloroform: she said to him that she should always look upon the administering it as an underhand trick not to be understood. There was no question of chloroform when she was in the room, and that was up to the very last moment; there was no chloroform present that she saw, and the doctors must have got it concealed in their pockets and produced it when her back was turned. She didn't blame Mr. Cray; she was certain it was not Mr. Cray; for he had told her privately in the afternoon that the operation would be a mere nothing, a flea-bite — and she could only wonder at Dr. Davenal's not having exercised more caution. One of the servants down stairs had had some experience in chloroform, she

added, and her opinion was that an over quantity must have been given: that Dr. Davenal had mistook the dose, and given too much. At any rate, if ever there was a murdered woman, it was her mistress.

Parkins's eyes were alight when she said this, and Parkins's cheeks aflame. Her grief for the loss of her mistress was merging into anger at its cause. Like Neal, she was beginning to consider it as a personal grievance inflicted on herself, and to resent it as such. Self-interest sways the best of us more or less: and Parkins felt that through this she had lost a better place than she should ever find again. Neal asked her a few questions on his own score, and hurried away with the information he had garnered.

He hastened home with the utmost speed that his legs would carry him. He had a reason — at least he thought he might have one in future — for not wishing it known at home that he had paid that visit to Lady Oswald's. The late returners from church were but in the streets when he went back, slowly pacing along in the lovely autumn night. He whisked in just in time to admit the ladies.

"Is papa in, Neal?"

"Yes," answered Neal, half-hazard, for he was of course not positive upon the point. "I fancy he is in his room, Miss Sara."

Sara knocked at the consulting-room door and entered. As she went forward, Neal contrived to obtain a passing view of the interior. It was still in darkness, and Dr. Davenal was leaning his back against the window-frame, his arms folded, his head bowed, as one will stand when under the weight of care.

"It looks just as though he had purposely killed her," was Neal's comment to himself.

Not that Neal thought it *then*. No, no. But Neal was in

a state of terrible vexation and disappointment; in that precise mood when it is a vast relief to vent one's trouble upon anybody.

"How sad you look, papa!" cried Sara, as she noted his depressed attitude. "And you are all in the dark!"

Dr. Davenal aroused himself, put his hand on his daughter, and turned round to face the street. At that moment the death-bell rang out.

Accustomed now to the darkness of the room — not that it was entirely dark, for the doctor had thrown open the Venetian blind, and the gas-lamp cast in its rays brightly — Sara could see how sad and clouded was his face. The death-bell was striking out its quick sharp strokes.

"Do you know who the bell is tolling for, papa? I never heard it ring out so late as this."

"I expect it is tolling for Lady Oswald."

"Papa! For Lady Oswald?" She quite shrieked as she said it in her startled surprise.

"She is dead, child," he said, his subdued voice a contrast to hers.

"O papa! Was it the operation? Did she die under it?"

"Yes — in one sense. The operation was successfully accomplished, but — chloroform was exhibited, and she never rallied from it."

Sara stood still, her heart beating. It seemed that a hundred regrets were crowding upon her, a hundred questions. "O papa, why did you administer chloroform?" she exclaimed, scarcely knowing what she said.

For a single moment the temptation came over Dr. Davenal to tell his daughter the truth, and he had unclosed his lips to speak; but he checked himself in time. Sara was trustworthy; he knew that; but it was impossible to answer for chance or inadvertent words, even from her; and for

Mark's sake it might be better to leave her in equal ignorance with the rest of the world.

"My dear," he said — and the words to her ear sounded strangely solemn — "I have striven to do the best always for my patients, under God. Had I been able to save Lady Oswald's life, I would have saved it."

"O yes, yes, papa, I know that. We all know it. Did she die quite suddenly? Was she sensible of her state?"

"People who die under the influence of chloroform seldom know anything after inhaling it. She did not. Sara, it is a painful subject; I would rather not speak of it. I feel it greatly — greatly."

She quitted him and went up stairs to take off her things. When she came down again Dr. Davenal was in the dining-room, and the tray, as was usual when they dined early, was on the table with some slight refreshment.

"Not anything for me," said the doctor to his sister. "I cannot eat to-night."

He did not sit down: he was pacing the carpet with thoughtful, measured tread. Neal stole a glance at him from under the corner of his eyes.

"Shall I light the gas in your study, sir, to-night?"

"No. Yes, you may light one burner," the doctor added after a moment's pause.

"What's the matter, Richard?" asked Miss Davenal. "You seem cut up. Have you had a hard day's work to-day?"

"Pretty well," called out the doctor.

"Do you know who it is that's dead? Very queer that the passing-bell should toll out at night!"

"You can tell your aunt, Sara," the doctor quietly said, as he stepped to the door of the room, and vanished.

"Well, I'm sure!" angrily cried Miss Davenal. "My brother is polite to-night. He might have answered me."

Sara pushed from her the piece of cake she had been trying to eat, and went close to her aunt, speaking in her slowest and most distinct tones.

"Don't you see that papa has had a great shock — a blow, Aunt Bettina? Lady Oswald is dead."

Poor Miss Davenal, never very quick at comprehending, confused the information together in the most helpless manner. "What do you say? Lady Oswald has had a blow? Who's dead?"

"Aunt, aunt! you will understand me if you won't be impatient. Lady Oswald is dead. And I say it is a great blow to papa. I can see that it is."

Miss Davenal heard now, and looked perfectly scared. "Lady Oswald dead! It cannot be, Sara."

"She had to undergo some operation in consequence of the accident, and papa gave her chloroform, hoping of course to lighten the pain, and she never rallied from it."

Miss Davenal seized Sara's hands in her dismay. Her senses were sharpened and she had heard perfectly; her face had turned white. Neal, who had come in, looked at her as he stood near the door, and wondered whether she was going to faint.

"Sara, I don't like that chloroform. I have told the doctor so, often and often. They should never try it upon me. Who gave it her?"

"Papa," replied Sara, never dreaming but she was correct in saying so. "Aunt Bettina, he gave it her for the best."

"Best! of course he gave it for the best — nobody disputes that. But I don't like it: I never did like it. Chloroform is come into fashion now — an improvement on the old state of

things, they call it, as they call the railways — and I don't deny that it spares pain; but I do not like it."

By and by Sara went to the consulting-room. The doctor was pacing it uneasily.

"I have come to say good-night, papa."

"You are going to bed early. Is it ten o'clock?"

"Yes, I think it is past ten. Good-night, dear papa. I hope you will be better in the morning."

"I have felt nothing like it since the death of Richard. Good-night, my child."

It was not so much the death in itself that was affecting Dr. Davenal, as the appalling reflection that it had been, in a manner, wilfully caused. The knowledge weighed on his heart like a stone.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Night Visitor to Dr. Davenal.

THE bed-chamber of Sara Davenal was over the doctor's study, on the opposite side of the landing to the drawing-room. It was not a large room, but longer than it was wide, and the bed was placed at the far end of the room — the back. The chamber behind it was larger, and occupied by Miss Davenal. The room opposite Miss Davenal's, and behind the drawing-room, had been the bed-chamber of Dr. Davenal in his wife's lifetime; since her death it had been kept as a spare room for chance visitors.

Sara did not begin to undress immediately upon entering the room. She put out the light, and sat down at the open window to indulge in a little quiet thought: it was rather a habit of hers to do so when the night was fine and she came up early. She liked to sit there and think of many things, to glance up at the clear sky in the bright moonlight. With all

her practical good sense — and she had her full portion of it — she was of a somewhat dreamy, imaginative temperament: and since Richard's death she had grown to think more of that other home to which he was gone, the same to which we are all hastening, than it is perhaps usual for girls of Sara's age to think of it. As she had said to Dr. Davenal in the afternoon, she would wonder whether Richard and her lost mother — whom she but imperfectly remembered — could look down upon her: she was fond of fancying that they were looking down upon her: and she would lose herself in a maze of visionary imaginings.

Not on this night, however, did her thoughts turn to Richard. They were full of Lady Oswald and her unhappy death. That this fatal chloroform had been administered for the best, in accordance with Dr. Davenal's experienced judgment, Sara assumed as a matter of course; she never so much as thought of casting a doubt to it: but she knew enough of him to be sure that the fatal termination would cause him to repent of having given it — to blame himself bitterly, and she felt for him to the very depth of her heart. An uncomfortable sensation as if her father had been guilty of some deliberate wrong was pervading her, and she could not shake it off.

It should be observed that although Sara sat close to the open window, she was not liable to be seen by the passers-by in the street, did any cast their eyes that way. A small stand or ledge had been constructed round the window (a bay window, as was the one answering to it on the other side, the drawing-room), and this was filled with pots in flower. Geraniums of many species, fuchsias, heliotropes, heaths, wild thyme, the fine flowering cactus, and many others, raised their heads proudly and formed a screen behind which Sara was securely sheltered from observation, and also from the rays of the gas-lamp at the gate, which otherwise would

have lighted her up. So that, although she could see out perfectly well, sitting as she now was, she could not be seen. If she chose to stand at the window and lean out, her head was above the flowers, but at the same time they entirely prevented her from seeing anything immediately below her window. The ground for a yard or two beyond Dr. Davenal's study window was as completely hidden from her as though it had been a hundred miles off; and it is necessary to mention this. The bed-room above Sara's, occupied by Watton the upper maid, had a flat window, and its view underneath was in like manner obstructed by the extending bow and the plants in it of Sara's. These flowers at Miss Sara Davenal's window were quite the admiration of the pedestrian portion of Hallingham, and many a one would halt at the front railings to take a passing gaze at them. They were really beautiful, and Sara took a pride in them and liked to tend them.

She liked to inhale their sweet perfume, as she was doing now, sweeter and stronger in the night air than in the garish day. Perhaps the heliotrope was of all the most powerful scent: and somehow that heliotrope had become associated in her mind with Mr. Oswald Cray. She could not have told why or wherefore; she had never attempted to analyse the cause: she only knew that when she approached that window, and the perfume of the heliotrope was wafted to her senses, the image of Oswald Cray was, in like manner, by some mysterious instinct, wafted to her mind.

Perhaps it did not require any extraneous aid to bring him to her memory. He was already too securely seated there. For the last twelvemonth, since Oswald Cray had become intimate at their house, her love for him had been gradually growing into being: that subtle understanding, never to be explained or accounted for, which draws together two human

hearts, and only those two, the one for the other, of all the whole world, life finding life, had arisen between them. Oswald Cray had never spoken or hinted at his feelings until the time when Dr. Davenal honestly avowed to him that he had fancied he cared for Caroline: that had brought forth the one word — and it was little more — to Sara. But she had known it just as surely as though he had spoken out all along.

Save for that shrinking reticence which would fain hide the secret, as the modest snowdrop hides its head, and which must always accompany the feeling if it be genuine, there was nothing to be ashamed of in this love. It is true that it had become entwined with every fibre of her heart, was a part and parcel of her very being. It would perhaps have been impossible — at least, it would have been very improbable — for Sara Davenal, with her right feeling, her powers of discernment, which she possessed in a high degree, and her sound good sense, to fall in love with an unworthy man. She could not have met with a more worthy one than Oswald Cray. He had his faults — ay, who has not? — but they were faults of what may be called a high order; not mean, drivelling, scandalizing faults, that abound in the world. Each was suited and suitable to the other, in taste, in position, in moral goodness: and their love had been given for aye; beyond the power of circumstances or time to change. They might never be more to each than they were now. Untoward fate might separate them; the world's bitter tongues, expediency, the poison of misunderstanding; any one of these separating causes might part them; Sara's unbending principle, Oswald's wrong-headed pride — it was impossible to foretell: but of one thing both might rest assured, that unto their dying day that love could never be wholly extinguished in either heart, so as to give place to another.

Somehow the thoughts of Sara Davenal had wandered from the painful subject of Lady Oswald to this brighter one: wandered unwittingly, against her will. She would not have *chosen* to dwell upon her love that sad night, or on the one sweet word of Oswald when he last parted from her: but there it was, sounding in her ears and her heart: and she lost herself in one of the sweetest reveries that ever maiden pictured of the future.

Suddenly she was aroused from it. Not by any thought of poor Lady Oswald, or of her father's sorrow, or of the minutes that were hurrying on, or that it was time she prepared for bed; but by the sight of some one coming in at the front gate. It was nothing unusual for that gate to be invaded at night, by messengers summoning Dr. Davenal to some urgent bed of sickness. But this intruder had something peculiar about him, or about his movements, which attracted her eye.

He was a tall man, wearing a cap and a grey Scotch plaid scarf. The cap, which had a peak to it, appeared to be tied down over his ears, and the scarf was worn in a droll fashion, one at least that Sara had never seen in Hallingham. It was put lengthways over the shoulders, as a lady puts on a scarf; it came down to the waist behind, and was held very much up to the neck in front. Sara naturally looked at the man, looked keenly with a view of distinguishing his features. In her sympathy with the sick, she thought to learn, by him, who was ill that night and wanted her father. But she was unable to do this, and the first thought that struck upon her as curious was, that a man should be so completely wrapped up on that genial night. The next curious thing that struck her was — the man's movements.

He had come up to the gate with very quick steps — as messengers from the sick often did come — opened it, and gave a sort of dart or spring to his right, which brought him

under the shade of the laurels and hid him from the moonlight. There he stopped, reconnoitring the house, so far as could be seen, but really it required a quick eye to distinguish him at all from the dark shrubs. That was not precisely the way in which night applicants came to Dr. Davenal's house; and Sara, very much astonished, rose quietly from her seat, to see the better.

He came on at last, creeping close to the shrubs, stooping under their shade, until he gained Dr. Davenal's window. With all Sara's endeavours to look, she there lost sight of him, because he was beneath, but she heard a gentle tapping at the window. Not the quick imperative noise of one in haste, demanding instant attention, but a covert, stealthy tapping, which seemed afraid of being heard. More and more astonished, Sara leaned out further; but she could not lean far enough to see.

The window was opened instantly: therefore it was to be supposed that Dr. Davenal had not retired from the room; that his light had probably guided the stranger to apply at the window, instead of at the door. The first sound, after the opening of the window, was a warning hush-sh-sh-sh! but whether it came from the applicant or from her father she could not tell. A short colloquy followed, only a word or two in the most covert tones, and then Dr. Davenal went to the front door and admitted the visitor. Sara sat down overwhelmed with amazement.

Somebody else was overwhelmed with amazement unfortunately, — or perhaps the better word for *him* would be curiosity, — and that was Mr. Neal. Neal had been a witness to it all. When it struck half-past ten — and this mysterious visit occurred some five minutes subsequent to that time — Dr. Davenal had opened his study door, called to Neal, and told him to put the gas out. Which was equivalent to telling him

to go to bed: the putting out of the gas being the last service usually required of Neal. Neal came forward and did as he was bid — he put out the hall-lamp and any other burners that might be alight, with the exception of the one in the doctor's study. Dr. Davenal always took that upon himself, and he put out the burner as he spoke to Neal, and lighted his candle for bed, no gas being laid on in the bedrooms. Neal then went down stairs and turned the gas off at the main; so the house was safe.

But Neal, as a matter of taste, was not fond of retiring early. And when he came up again, and had shut himself into his pantry, instead of passing into his sleeping-room he blew out his candle, opened the door on the side, and, dexterously avoiding contact with the shrubs, he stole to the front. There he stood, amidst the shrubs, near the doctor's window, with a view possibly of giving himself a little fresh air.

He glanced at the window; the half shutters were not drawn up, a thing the doctor did himself the very last thing, and he could see the wax candle on the table through the Venetian blinds. The upper shutters of the window were closed; Neal always closed those when he lighted the gas; but his orders were to leave the lower ones open. It was a fancy of the doctor's, the being able to take a look out at the street until the last, if he chose to do so. The upper shutters being closed did not prevent the window being opened at will. It is as well to give these details, for this was an eventful night in the existence of Dr. Davenal: and of others besides.

Neal could see the candle, and he could see his master. Dr. Davenal was seated at the table, his head leaning on his hand. Whether he was reading, or whether he had merely bent his head in thought, Neal could not discern, but he thought he had never in his life seen a countenance so troubled.

There was nothing in all that, however, to afford particular gratification to Neal's curiosity, and he drew cautiously away from the window, and turned his attention on the street. It was necessary to be cautious, for the least stir of the shrubs would have been heard by Dr. Davenal on that still night; sitting as he did with the window a little open, his custom until he retired. Neal stood watching the passers-by. Stay; watching *for* any passers-by; but he had not seen one yet. Sunday evening hours were early at Hallingham, and people were mostly indoors and abed. Now, in point of fact, Neal had no particular motive in stealing out and standing there; he was not expecting any one or anything; but he had a habit of peering about him a great deal more than most people have, and Neal rarely went finally to rest without coming out to take a general glance round, and see anything there might be to see.

Little did Neal anticipate the reward his curiosity was to receive this night. He was taking a last look previous to retreating, thinking it rather slow work standing there with nothing to see, not even a passing passenger on that quiet Sunday night, when the man who had so surprised Sara Davenal darted in at the gate. Neal strained his eyes in a vain attempt to discover who it was, and backed into safe quarters.

He heard the covert tapping at the window; he heard the warning hush when the doctor opened it, and he could not say for certain, any more than Sara could, which of the two it was who had given that warning hush; and then after a short whispering, the purport of which he was entirely unable to make out, the doctor's tones were a little raised:

"I will open the door for you."

The stranger made his way to the front door. Neal, in the swift, unerring, covert manner which practice had rendered

facile, stole back to his pantry with incredible speed, and was in time to peep out of it, and to see the visitor admitted.

But he gained nothing by his movement. The hall was in the dark: Dr. Davenal had not brought his candle out, and Neal could not see more than the very faintest outline of their forms. They passed into the room in silence, and Neal heard the door closed quietly and cautiously: another minute and the bolt was slipped. He took off his shoes and stole on tiptoe in his stockings to the door, and put his ear to it.

No, not a word could he hear. That door was a sound door, a close-fitting one: Neal had tried it before in his life, and obtained no more result than he was obtaining now. He made his way back through the pantry to the window again, and there Neal could have groaned in impotent rage had he dared, for Dr. Davenal had shut it.

But he had not closed the shutters. Neal, if it was any good to him, could still get a glimpse in through the upright staves of the green dwarf blinds. It was but a glimpse, for they were turned all but close together, the one stave nearly lying on the other, and it did not afford him satisfaction, for he could see neither Dr. Davenal nor his visitor, who were seated at the side of the room close together where the angle of view obtainable by Neal would not reach them. A very faint hum of voices penetrated his ear, and he was not sure whether that was not fancy. Their conversation was being carried on in the lowest tones.

Unsatisfactory as was this result as a whole, Neal waited with patience. Such men as Neal are always patient. The clock struck eleven, and the clock struck half-past eleven, and Neal was still there.

Then there occurred a change. Dr. Davenal rose from his seat and began pacing the room. His whole face was working with agitation. Neal caught a sight of it occasionally as

he paced, and was struck by the troubled expression, nay, by the *dread* that pervaded it. Neal had long ago made up his mind as to the purport of the visit — that it was in some way connected with the catastrophe of the evening, the death of Lady Oswald.

Suddenly Neal was startled. His nose was uncommonly close to the window, and the window was abruptly raised; raised without the slightest warning some half-dozen inches. Neal believed his nose was off.

When he came to himself, which he really did not for a few minutes, some words in a wailing tone were issuing from the lips of Dr. Davenal. "Silence must be purchased at any price; at any price. If it takes the whole of my fortune, I must purchase silence." Neal pricked up his ears.

Dr. Davenal was walking still; the visitor, whoever he might be, never moved from his seat. It was only when the doctor came near the window that Neal caught an occasional word. "Yes, Lady Oswald herself. She wished it," were the next words he heard, and then there was another temporary lull.

"I am aware of that. Murder? yes, the world would look upon it as such. I felt certain that Lady Oswald was one to whom chloroform, if administered, would prove fatal. Heaven help me! What have I done that the trials of this day should fall upon my head?"

Dr. Davenal was standing at the window as he said this, had halted there with his voice close to Neal's face, and Neal's hair stood on end as he heard it. From that moment the man believed — fully believed in his inmost heart — that his master had purposely destroyed Lady Oswald. Perhaps the belief, judging from these disconnected and certainly ominous words, was excusable.

For a short while Neal heard no more. His master had

halted opposite the stranger and was talking fast, but nothing came to Neal but a confused sound. Then he advanced again.

"I tell you it shall be done. If it costs every penny piece that I have saved, this horrible secret must be bought up — if money will buy it. I shall never know another happy moment: I shall live as with a sword of disgrace hanging over me, ever expecting it to fall."

Some murmured words came from the stranger, and Neal stretched his ear to its utmost tension. Whether in doing so he made the least noise, touched the window, rustled the shrubs, he could not tell, but Dr. Davenal turned and shut the window down as swiftly and suddenly as he had put it up.

So, hearing was cut off. But Neal could see still — just a glimpse. He saw Dr. Davenal go out of the room with the candle and bring back a plate of biscuits and a decanter of wine. He knew he must have gone to the dining-room side-board for them. A wish crossed Neal's mind to go indoors, make the excuse that he had heard his master stirring, and dash into the study on the pretence of inquiring if he could do anything. But he did not dare. Neal would have given a whole year's wages to get one good look at the visitor. Presently all sight was cut off. Barely had Dr. Davenal put down the decanter and biscuits than he turned to the window and pulled up the shutters.

It was a checkmate for Neal. He went in and stood just outside his pantry, hesitating whether to go close to the room door or not. A good thing he did not, for Dr. Davenal came out almost immediately, and went up stairs to his daughter's room.

Neal heard him knock at it very softly: he heard him ask in a whisper whether she was in bed yet. That she was not in bed the immediate opening of the door proved.

Dr. Davenal went in and closed the door. Neal could hear the murmur of his voice, as if he were explaining something to his daughter, and then they came down together, treading softly, not to arouse the house. Neal could see that she was fully dressed, in the same silk she had worn in the day. They went in, and the door was closed, and the bolt slipped as before.

Ten minutes, and Sara came out again alone. Neal could tell who it was by the rustling of the silk, but there was no light. She returned upstairs to her room, but not before Neal thought he had caught the sound of a sob.

The next to come forth was the visitor, without a candle still. Dr. Davenal opened the hall door and let him out. Neal, with his quick movements, glided round to his post of observation in the front garden, and was just in time to see him go through the gate, the cap drawn over his face, and the grey woollen scarf muffled around him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

After the Visitor's Departure.

IF ever the signs of misery, of despair, of terror, were depicted on a human face, they were on Dr. Davenal's as he sat that night in his study. He was as a man who has received some great shock; a shock that strikes a species of paralysis alike to the heart and to the frame. His arms hung down listlessly, his head was bent, his fixed eyes had a wild anxious look, most foreign to the usually calm orbs of the composed surgeon. An hour and a quarter had he thus sat since the departure of that midnight visitor who had brought with him so much apparent mystery, so much woe, and the house clock was striking one. The sound did not arouse Dr. Davenal; he sat on with his face of terrified despair.

The wax taper, unheeded, unlooked at, stood on a side table where it had been accidentally put. It had burnt nearly to the socket, and it now began to spurt and gutter with a great light; the signs of its end. That awoke Dr. Davenal from his reverie. The prospect of being left in the dark was not a convenient one; and he tore a bit of paper from a journal lying near and essayed to light the gas, completely forgetting that it had been turned off at the main.

Finding his mistake, he stood a moment with his hand to his temples, as if endeavouring to collect thought, and then opened the door of his bedroom. Candles always stood there on the mantel-piece ready for lighting, and he brought one forward and succeeded in catching a light for it from the dying taper.

This had the effect of effectually arousing him. He looked at his watch, and then held the candle to a book-shelf, whence he selected a local railway guide, and sat down to the table to consult it.

"Nothing until the morning!" he exclaimed in a tone that might have been one of vexation but for its deeper pain. "Stay, though! Yes, there is. There's the train that passes here at 3.20 for Merton: and I should find a train on from thence. Then I must go by it: there's no time to be lost, once the morrow has dawned, if this unhappy business is to be suppressed. Twenty minutes past three; and now it is one; I can lie down for an hour and a half."

He went at once into his bedroom, took off his coat, and lay down on the outside of the bed. There was no fear of his oversleeping himself: sleep for a troubled mind in its first shock, troubled as was Dr. Davenal's, is out of the question.

Rest also seemed to be. He could not lie. He tossed and turned on the uneasy counterpane, and finally sprang off it with a wail of agony, and took to pacing the room. Neal, who

was regaling his ear at the chamber-door, could hear every footfall of the slippers, every groan of the distressed heart. Never more, never more in this world, would the heart of Richard Davenal lose its care.

Neal was not in the habit, with all his ferreting propensities, of sitting up at night to pursue them; but this night was an exceptional one. To say that Neal had been astonished, confounded at what had taken place, at the knowledge he believed he had acquired, would be saying little, in comparison with its effect upon his mind. He did not love his master; he did not like him; it may not be going too far to say that he hated him: for Neal's instinct had taught him that his master partially saw through him, partially suspected him to be the villain that he was; but to believe him capable of deliberately destroying one of his patients, was in truth almost too great a stretch for even Neal. Until that night, Neal could not have believed him capable of any wrong act: he gave him credit, for he could not help doing so, for his honour and his virtues, while he disliked him: but he did in truth now believe that Dr. Davenal had wilfully killed Lady Oswald. That is, that he had given her the chloroform deliberately, knowing it would probably take her life.

The faintest possible doubt of this had been first caught from the words of Parkins. Not real doubt, but a sort of angry feeling of the extreme imprudence of the doctor in having given it: Neal no more believed then that Dr. Davenal had done it, or was capable of doing it, than he could have believed the most monstrous improbability in the world. Still the *idea* had been admitted: and when that strange visitor was with his master afterwards, and Neal heard, with his own ears, the suspicious words that fell, he could put upon them but one interpretation — that, incredible as it seemed, his master *was* guilty, and not unintentionally, of the death of

Lady Oswald. Neal hoped to arrive at the why and the wherefore, and he thought nothing of sitting up the night to do it: if by that means he might gain any satisfactory solution. Neal, it must be confessed, was utterly stunned with the affair, with the belief; and could not see or understand yet with any clearness: like a man who is struck violently on the head and looks around him in stupid helpless maze, as if he had a dead wall before him. A shock to the head and a shock to the mind will bear for the passing moment the same apparent result.

Dr. Davenal paced his room, his two rooms in fact, for the door was open between them, and he passed from one to the other in his restless wanderings, his mental agony. Soon after two he began to wash and dress himself; that is, he changed some of his clothes, and poured out a wash-hand basin of cold water and splashed his face with it. He put on a pair of boots; he searched for his gloves; he looked out an overcoat: and then he stood for a few minutes and thought.

Lifting the writing desk from underneath the table, where you may remember it was kept, he unlocked it, and was for some little time examining certain papers it contained. Some of these he put in his pocket, and then he locked the desk and replaced it. Next he sat down to write a note; just a line or two.

It was getting on past the half hour then. He opened the door and went forth from his room. Neal, who had heard him coming, peeped from his pantry and saw him turn to the stairs, the candle in one hand, a note held in the other. Neal cautiously stole forward a step or two, and looked and listened.

He was down-stairs again instantly; he had only gone to the first floor, and had not opened any door, or Neal must have heard it: had not, in fact, been long enough to open one.

The note was gone from his hand, and Neal wondered where he had left it.

He went into the study, and came out without the light, an overcoat on, and his hat in his hand. The moonlight shone in now through the fan-light over the front door, and Neal could see so much. He appeared to be coming towards the pantry: Neal silently closed the door and slipped the noiseless bolt. Neal took very good care to keep his own locks and bolts well oiled.

Dr. Davenal essayed to open the pantry-door and found it fastened. He shook it, knocked at it, not over gently. Neal, too great a diplomatist to be taken at a loss, flung off his coat, waistcoat, and slippers, threw back his braces, rumped his hair, and opened the door to his master with the air of a man just aroused from his bed.

"Why do you sleep with the door locked, Neal?" — and the question was put in an imperative tone.

"I — it is but very rare that I do, sir. I must have shot the bolt last night without thinking of it."

"I won't have it done. Nobody shall sleep in my house with a locked door. It is a dangerous habit. Were a fire to take place, and the sleeper a heavy one, he might not be aroused in time. Don't do it again. Neal," he continued, changing his tone, "I am summoned out farther away than usual. I don't care to disturb Miss Davenal — you can tell them to-morrow morning. I shall not be home all day."

"Have you to go far, sir?" inquired Neal.

"Yes. I don't expect to be home all day, I tell you, and that's why I bid you inform them. Nobody is to sit up for me to-morrow night: I may be detained longer. Tell Miss Davenal so."

"Very well, sir," replied Neal. "Is the carriage ready for you?"

Neal put this cunningly. He felt sure his master was not going in the carriage.

"I don't require the carriage. That's all, Neal; you can go to bed again. I was obliged to disturb you."

Dr. Davenal turned, walked straight to the front door, and let himself out at it, closing it securely after him. Neal waited a moment, rearranged his attire a little, and then stepped also to the front door and drew the heavy bolt across it. No danger now of his master's coming in with his latch-key to pounce upon him.

Neal got a light, went into the study, and took a leisurely survey. He was scarcely rewarded. There was nothing whatever about, more than on other mornings: no signs remained of the stranger's visit, not a trace that could betray any disturbance on the part of Dr. Davenal. The sherry and biscuits were put up: Neal walked across to the dining-room and found them in the sideboard, just as he had left them on the previous night. The glass, used, stood on it. Neal solaced himself with some of the sherry, and went back to the study.

The old cloth was undisturbed on the table, the blotting-book and inkstand lying on it. Neal looked through the book, but received no satisfaction. He examined the pens, and saw that in one the ink was not yet dry. In the bedroom the clothes which his master had taken off lay about; Mr. Neal *en passant* visited the pockets and found them empty; and the bed was pressed on the outside, but had not been slept in. That curious visit in the night might have been a dream, for all there was left to tell of it.

"But there's that note yet," thought Neal. "What did he take it up-stairs for, and where did he leave it?"

Stealing up the stairs in his stockinged feet, shading the light in his hand, Neal came to the vestibule, and looked on the table. He looked on the stand which held a beautiful statue in marble, he looked up even at the frames of the pictures; he looked everywhere. But there was no letter.

"I'm positive he did not stop long enough to open a door!" ejaculated Neal, rather at a nonplus.

A bright thought struck him. He bent down, shading still the light with his hand, and peered under Miss Sara Davenal's door. And then came Neal's reward. He saw the corner of something white quite close to him, not pushed entirely beyond the door. Dr. Davenal, not to disturb his daughter, had pushed his letter to her in that way.

Neal took out his pen-knife, and, with its help, by dint of perseverance and ingenuity, succeeded in drawing back the note, which he stole down-stairs with, and into his own chamber. A little more ingenuity with the pen-knife, and the envelope, not yet fully dry, came open. Neal had obtained an insight into some secrets in his life, but never one so weighty as this, never one that touched on that ugly word "murder" which was running through Neal's mind: and his usually impassive face grew streaked with scarlet in excitement.

"MY DEAR CHILD,

"Business connected with this most unhappy secret obliges me to go out for a day, perhaps two. I shall leave a message with Neal. Do not appear to know anything when he delivers it: hear it as though you were a stranger to everything. Don't talk of my absence to any one if you can help it. People will conclude I have gone to see some patient at a distance, as will your aunt: it is not necessary to undeceive them.

"R. D."

There was not so very much to be made out of that, and the scarlet streaks faded again from Neal's disappointed face. "This most unhappy secret," he repeated over twice, as if the words bore some euphonious sound. Whatever it might be, the secret, it was evident that Miss Sara Davenal had been made cognisant of it; and Neal rather rejoiced in the pill it must be for her, for he liked his young mistress not one whit better than he liked his master. He read the note again, re-fastened it in the envelope, stole up-stairs to push it under the door, and then retired to his late bed.

CHAPTER XIX.

Commotion.

MEANWHILE, Dr. Davenal was walking along the streets of the town, lying so calm, so still in the moonlight. Not with any hurried tread; rather with a slow one. In his restlessness of mind, he had come out sooner than he need have come; but bodily action is a relief to mental anguish.

"Good-night, doctor! or rather morning — for that's what it is."

The salutation came from one of the general practitioners of the town, a hard-worked apothecary, whose business took him abroad a good deal at night. He was hastening up a side street, near the town-hall, and Dr. Davenal had not observed him.

"Ah, is it you, Smithson? A fine night, is it not?"

"All nights are pretty near the same to me," returned Mr. Smithson. "I see too much of them. I wish folks would be so accommodating as to choose the day to be ill in. I don't know who'd be one of us. It's not often that we see you abroad at night, though, doctor!"

"Not often. We can't help it sometimes, you know. Good-night."

They were bound different ways. The doctor had walked on his, when Mr. Smithson came running back.

"Dr. Davenal, what is the truth about Lady Oswald? I hear she's dead."

"She is — unhappily."

"And the report going about is, that she died from the effects of chloroform! Could not rally after inhaling it."

"Ah, it's a sad thing," replied the doctor; "a grievous thing. There's the dark side in these new discoveries of our practice: sacrificing the few while blessing the many. Good-night, I say. I can't stop."

"It's true, then, that it was the chloroform?"

"Yes, it's true."

Dr. Davenal increased his pace: he was in no mood for questioning, and this in particular was painful to him. A short while, and he stood before the abbey, looking up at its windows. He was sorry to disturb Mark, but he deemed it was necessary, and he rang the night bell.

A new bell which Mark Cray had caused to be placed in the house since he took it, and which rang himself up, not his household. Dr. Davenal waited, but the ring was unanswered, and he rang again, with the like result.

A third summons brought Mark to the window, which he threw up, half asleep still. "If that's the way you are going to let your night applicants ring, Mark Cray, almost as good not put up the bell."

Mark Cray could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw who was the speaker. "I was in a heavy sleep," he answered. "Did you ring more than once?"

A heavy sleep! Truly Dr. Davenal marvelled at the

words. He marvelled that sleep could have visited Mark Cray that night, after his share in its fatal work.

"What is the matter?" asked Mark. "Am I wanted?"

"It is I who want you," said the doctor. "I must say a word to you if you'll come down. I am called out of town."

Mark attired himself sufficiently to descend, which he did in a state of wonder. He had never received a night visit from Dr. Davenal; it was quite out of the usual order of things, and he would about as soon have expected to see a live kangaroo wait upon him. He opened the front door, and they stepped into the large parlour.

"Who is ill?" inquired Mark. "Are you called out far?"

"I am going out on a little private business of my own. The train for Merton will be through presently, and I shall take it. If" —

"Why did you not tell me last night?" interrupted Mark.

"Because I did not then know I should have to go. You must take my patients for me. What I wished particularly to say to you was about the inquest. They can't call it for to-morrow, — that is, to-day — Monday; but I think they are sure to hold it on Tuesday. If I am not back" —

"What inquest?" interrupted Mark, wonderingly.

"The inquest on Lady Oswald."

"My goodness! Do you think they'll get up an inquest over her?"

"Of course they will. What are you dreaming of? The remote cause of her death was the accident to the train. I am not quite sure of being back. I expect to be home on Tuesday morning early: but it is possible I may be detained a little longer. If I am not back, Mark, you will be the only witness — at least, the only one who can speak to the facts of the death. Let me advise you to say as little as possible.

Volunteer no information; answer their questions briefly; and don't get into a long-winded narration, as you are apt to do, otherwise you may betray yourself. You will not mistake me," Dr. Davenal added. "I have always been open, truthful, candid as the day; and if I so speak now it is in your interest. I was thinking this over a great deal last evening after I left you, and I see that it is essential for your good name in your profession that the facts of the case should not be made known. Do not suppose I advise you to a direct deviation from the truth; nothing of the sort. 'Chloroform was exhibited with a view to lessen her sufferings, and she never rallied from it,' is all you need say. Similar cases are unhappily not unknown; I fear not very uncommon; and the coroner will not be likely to exact minute particulars, or inquire whether you gave it her, or whether I did. He will assume that we acted in concert."

Mark Cray nodded. He was nervously and incessantly pushing back his hair.

"I know how fond you are of talking," resumed Dr. Davenal, "therefore I deemed it well to give you this caution. To tell you the truth, I had rather not be at the inquest, and shall not be sorry if I can't get back."

"Are you going away on purpose?" suddenly asked Mark, who was much given to leap to conclusions.

"Certainly not. I am going on an important matter of my own. Look here, Mark Cray: one good turn deserves another. It will be concluded in the town that I am called to a patient at a long distance: as I have been before, you know, and detained out two or three days. People will be sure to think it now, and there's no necessity to undeceive them. You will oblige me in this. I don't want the town to concern itself with my private affairs: let people think I am with a patient. They don't know to the contrary at home."

"I shan't say anything to the contrary," said Mark. "Let people think what they will: they are a set of busy-bodies at the best."

Dr. Davenal departed. And Mr. Cray went back to his room, sleepy still, but wondering in the midst of it what could have called away the doctor suddenly to a distance. No letter could have arrived in the middle of the night, Mark argued: and a suspicion crossed his mind that he was, in spite of his denial, going away to avoid the inquest.

The doctor walked over to the station, there to await the train. He had given this caution, as to Mark's testimony at the inquest, entirely in his good feeling towards him, his solicitude for his welfare. For himself, he did hope he should not be back for it. Inconvenient questions might be asked, and he did not relish the idea of standing up and avowing that he had so far helped-on Lady Oswald's death as to have joined in giving her the chloroform: he could not avow it without testifying to a deliberate falsehood: yet he must do it, or betray Mark Cray. But he had a matter of greater importance to think of than the inquest: a matter that was weighing down his heart with its dread. Of all the passengers that train contained, soon to be whirling on its way to Merton, not one had the sickening care to battle with that was distracting the flourishing and envied physician.

The first to enter the breakfast-room that morning at his residence was his sister. The meal was always laid in the dining-room. Miss Davenal wore her usual morning costume, a gown of that once fashionable but nearly obsolete material, called nankin — or nankeen, as some spell it. It was not made up fashionably, but in the old scant style, and it made Miss Davenal's tall spare form look taller and sparer. She wore it for breakfast only, generally dressing for the day as soon as the meal was over. Sara followed, in a flowing dress

of delicate sprigged muslin, and she took her seat at once at the breakfast-table.

"Is your papa out of his room yet, do you know?"

"I have not seen him," replied Sara, a faint red tinging her pale face at the half-evasive answer. Very pale she looked: ominously pale. Had Miss Bettina been gifted with preternatural penetration, she might have detected that some great dread was upon her.

But Miss Bettina was on that morning especially self-occupied. On the previous Saturday Dr. Davenal had told her that certain country friends were coming into Hallingham on that day, Monday, and he should invite them to dinner; or else that he had invited them: in her deafness she did not catch which. She had replied by asking him what he would have for dinner, and he said they would settle all that on Monday morning. Monday morning was now come; and Miss Bettina, a punctilious housekeeper, choosing to have everything in order and to treat visitors liberally, was on the fidget to make the arrangements, and waited impatiently for Dr. Davenal. Watton, a fidget also in the domestic department, liking at any rate to get her orders in time, had come in with Miss Davenal.

Miss Davenal rang the bell: an intimation to Neal that they were ready for the coffee. She turned to the table, and the first thing that struck her sharp eye in its arrangements was, that only two breakfast cups were on it.

"What is Neal thinking of this morning?" she exclaimed.

"I don't fancy my master is stirring yet," observed Watton. "I have not heard him."

"Nonsense!" returned her mistress. "When did you ever know your master not stirring at eight o'clock?"

"Not often, ma'am, it's true," was Watton's answer.

"But it might happen. I know he was disturbed in the night."

Sara glanced up with a half-frightened glance. She dropped her head again, and began making scores on the cloth with her silver fork.

"It was the oddest thing," began Watton — and she was speaking in the low clear tones which made every word distinct to Miss Davenal. "Last night I was undressing with the blind up, without a candle, for the moon was light as day, when I saw a man turn in at the gate, and I said to myself, 'Here comes somebody bothering for master!' He made a spring to the side, and crouched himself amid the laurels that skirt the rails by the lane, and stopped there looking at the house. 'Very strange!' I said to myself again; 'that's not the way sick folk's messengers come in.' After a minute he walked on, brushing close to the shrubs, afraid I suppose of being seen, and I heard him tap at the window of the doctor's consulting-room. Ma'am, if ever I thought of a robber in my life, I thought of one then, and if it hadn't been for my presence of mind, I should have rose the house with my screams" —

"Be silent, Watton!" sharply interrupted Miss Davenal. "Look there! You are frightening her to death."

She had extended her finger, pointing at Sara. Sara, her face more like death than life, in its ghastly whiteness, was gazing at Watton, her eyes strained, her lips apart, as one under the influence of some great terror. Was she afraid of what might be coming? It looked so.

"There's nothing to be alarmed at, Miss Sara" —

"Don't tell it; don't tell it," gasped Sara, putting up her hands. "It does frighten me."

"But indeed there is nothing to be frightened at, as you'll hear, Miss Sara," persisted the woman. "It's a fact that I

was a little frightened myself, one does hear of housebreakers getting into houses in so strange a manner, and I went out of my room and leaned over the banisters and listened. It was all right, for I heard the doctor open the hall door and take the man into his consulting-room, and shut himself in with him. How long the man stopped, and who he was, I can't tell; he did not go away while I was awake — but ma'am, that's how I know my master was disturbed in the night."

"Watton!" — and as Sara spoke her cheeks became crimson, her voice imperative, — "do you deem it lies in your service here to watch the movements of your master, and to comment upon them afterwards?"

The moment the words had left her lips, she felt how unwise they were; but she had so spoken in her perplexity, her soreness of heart. Watton turned her eyes on her young mistress in sheer amazement.

"Watch my master's movements! Why, Miss Sara, you can't think I'd do such a thing. I watched to — if I may so express it — protect my master; to protect the house, lest harm should be meant it. Decent folk don't come in at night as that man came in."

Neal had entered, and was disposing his eatables on the table. Miss Davenal drew his attention to the shortness of the cups.

"It is quite right, ma'am. The doctor went out in the middle of the night; at least about two in the morning; and he charged me to tell you he should not be at home all day; perhaps not all night. Nobody is to sit up for him."

"Where's he gone?" asked Miss Bettina.

Neal could not tell. His master had said he was going to a distance. But Miss Bettina could not make it out at all, and she asked question upon question. How had he gone? — the carriage was not out. Walked away on foot, and said

he was going to a distance and might not be home for a day and a night? It was the most mysterious, extraordinary proceedings she ever heard of. "Did you see or hear anything of a strange man coming in in the night?" she asked of Neal.

"No, ma'am," replied Neal, with his usual impassibility. "I see my master's bed has not been slept in; and he has taken an overcoat with him."

Sara lifted her burning face. It was as one stricken with fever.

"Let it rest; let it rest, Aunt Bettina! Wait until papa is home, and ask particulars of *him*. If patients require him at a distance, it is his duty to go to them."

The last words were spoken defiantly; not at her aunt, but at the servants. She felt on the very verge of desperation. What disastrous consequences might not this proclamation of the night's work bring forth!

"Let it rest!" retorted Miss Bettina. "Yes, that is what you young and careless ones would like to do. Look at my position! The responsible mistress of this house, and left at an uncertainty whether people are coming to dinner or whether they are not. Your papa must have gone clean out of his wits to go off and not leave word."

"You can fix upon a dinner as well as papa can, Aunt Bettina."

"Fix upon a dinner! It's not that. It is the not knowing whether there's to be a dinner fixed upon; whether people are invited, or not, to eat it."

When Miss Davenal was put out about domestic arrangements it took a great deal to put her in again. Neal and Watton were questioned and cross-questioned as to the events of the night, and breakfast was got over in a commotion.

Sara shivered with a nameless fear, and wondered whether that dreadful secret might not become known.

A secret which bore for Sara Davenal all the more terror from the fact that she was but imperfectly acquainted with its nature. Dr. Davenal had seen fit for certain reasons to call her down to his room, and she had there seen the ominous visitor: but the particulars had been kept from her. That there existed a secret, and a terrible one, which might burst at any hour over their heads, bringing with it disgrace as well as misery, she had been obliged to learn; but its precise nature she was not told; was not allowed, it may be said, to guess at. Dr. Davenal so far spared her. He spared her from the best of motives, forgetting that suspense is, of all human pain, the worst to bear.

With the exception of what that little note told her, which she saw lying inside her door when she rose in the morning, she knew nothing of the motives of her father's journey; where he had gone, or why he had gone. She only knew it was imperative that that night's visit to the house should remain a secret, uncommented upon, unglanced at. And now the servants knew of it — had seen the stranger come in — might talk about it in doors and out! No wonder that Sara Davenal shivered! — that she grew sick at heart!

CHAPTER XX.

Going down to the Funeral.

THE commotion in the town arose that morning to its height: it equalled the commotion at Miss Davenal's breakfast-table. But not from the same exciting cause. The one was led to by the curious absence of Dr. Davenal; the other had its source in the death of Lady Oswald.

She had lived so long amongst them — had been, so to say, the head of the social and visiting community of Hallingham! A great lady once, the Lady Oswald of Thorndyke. Had she died in the common course of nature, after weeks or months of illness, it would still have created a stir; but to have died from the inhaling of chloroform consequent upon the railway accident, did cause very great and unwonted excitement. People were shocked at her death: they mourned for the somewhat eccentric old lady who had been seen driven through their streets in her close carriage for years; but they never cast so much as a shadow of reproach towards the doctors who might be said to be, however unwittingly, the authors of it. They railed at the chloroform, calling it uncertain, dangerous stuff; but not the slightest reflection was thrown on the judgment which had caused her to inhale it.

Mark Cray was beset with questions and remarks, especially from his medical brethren in the town. In Dr. Davenal's absence, people flew to him for particulars. He remembered the doctor's caution, and said as little as possible. It was an unpleasant subject to speak of, he observed to them — they could understand that. But the curious questioners only understood it partially, and rather wondered why Mr. Cray should be so chary of his information.

The inquest took place on the Tuesday, as Dr. Davenal had surmised it would. It was held quite as a matter of course — not with a view to elicit the cause of death; that was already known — simply because the law rendered an inquest obligatory.

The doctor was not back for it, and Mr. Cray was the principal witness. The operation had been most satisfactorily performed by Dr. Davenal, he testified, but Lady Oswald did not rally from the effects of the chloroform. They had tried every means to arouse her without result. The coroner

presumed the chloroform had been administered with all due caution: he felt persuaded it would be by so experienced a surgeon as Dr. Davenal. Certainly, was the answer of Mark Cray. It was given her with the best of motives: to spare her acute suffering: and no one could more bitterly regret the result than they did. It was impossible to foresee, he continued, that this great blessing — yes, he must still call it so — to suffering humanity, which had spared anguish to thousands, perhaps he might say had spared lives, would have an opposite effect upon Lady Oswald, and bring death to her instead of relief. He had never for one moment in his own judgment doubted the expediency of giving it to her: were the thing to come over again (the result being hidden from him) he should do the same.

Not a word that Mark Cray said but had its weight, and was appreciated. The death was regarded as a pure misfortune, a sort of accident that could not be prevented by poor human foresight, and for which blame was attachable to no one. And the verdict was in accordance with this.

The only one on whom the facts were yet destined to make an unpleasant and not satisfactory impression, was Mr. Oswald Cray. The first intimation of Lady Oswald's death reached him through the "Times" newspaper. As junior in the firm, he lived in the house in Parliament Street, the senior partners preferring residences out of town. The chief part of the house was devoted to their business purposes, and Mr. Oswald Cray had but two or three rooms for his private use. On the Thursday morning, the Times was brought to him as usual while he was at breakfast. It was folded with the supplement outside, the deaths uppermost; and on putting it aside to open the more important part, his eye caught the word Oswald.

He looked further: and nothing could exceed his surprise.

He gazed at the announcement with a feeling of disbelief, almost as though he was in a dream. "At her residence in Hallingham, Susan Hannah Lady Oswald, aged seventy-one, widow of Sir John Oswald of Thorndyke."

The date of her death, probably by an oversight, had not been put in, and Oswald Cray was left to conjecture it. Certainly he did not suppose it had occurred so far back as on the previous Sunday, the day after he left Hallingham.

What had killed her? The accident? He had been given to understand that night that she was not materially injured: he now supposed she must have been. Why had nobody written to acquaint him? He would have been glad to see her for a final farewell; would have thought nothing of his time and trouble in going down for it. Mark might have written: he could not remember having corresponded with Mark in all his life, half brothers though they were; but still Mark might have gone out of his way to drop him a line now. Parkins might have written; in fact he considered it was Parkins's duty to have written, and he should tell her so: and Dr. Davenal might have written. Of the three mentioned, Oswald Cray would soonest have expected the doctor to write, and the omission struck him as being somewhat singular.

The post brought news. Amidst the mass of letters that came for the firm was one to himself. He saw the Hallingham post-mark and opened it at once.

A look of blank disappointment, mingled with surprise, settled on his face as he read. It was not from Dr. Davenal, from Mark Cray, or from Parkins; it gave him no details, any more than if he had been the greatest stranger to Lady Oswald. It was a formal intimation from the undertaker that her late ladyship's funeral would take place on Friday at eleven o'clock, and requesting his attendance at it, if convenient.

"Her funeral to-morrow!" ejaculated Oswald. "Then she must have died almost immediately. Perhaps the very night I came up. Why couldn't somebody write?"

He arranged business matters so as to go down that afternoon, and arrived at Hallingham between six and seven o'clock. Giving his portmanteau to a porter, he went on to his usual place of sojourn, the "Apple Tree." It was near to the terminus, a little beyond the town, one of the quiet country inns now nearly obsolete. An old-fashioned, plain, roomy house, whose swinging sign-board stood out before its door, and whose productive garden of vegetables and fruit stretched out behind it. No fashionable person would look at it twice. Oswald Cray had been recommended to it long ago as his place of sojourn in Hallingham, where his stay seldom lasted more than two days: and he had found himself so comfortable, so quiet, so entirely at home, that he would not have exchanged it for the grandest hotel in Hallingham, had the said hotel graciously intimated that it would receive him for nothing.

The host, whose name was John Hamos, came forward to receive him; a respectable, worthy man, with a portly person and red face, who might be seen occasionally in a white apron washing up glasses, and who waited on his guests himself. He and Oswald were the best of friends.

"Good-evening, sir. My wife said you'd be down to-night or in the morning. We were sure you'd attend the burying. A sad thing, sir, is it not?"

"It is a very sad thing, John," returned Oswald, "I seem as if I could not believe it. It was only this morning that I received the tidings. What did she die of? The accident to the train?"

"No, sir, she didn't die of that. Leastways, that was not the immediate cause of death, though of course it must be

said to have led to it. She died from the effects of chloroform."

"Died from — what did you say?" asked Oswald, staring at the man.

"From chloroform, sir."

"From chloroform!" he repeated. "I don't understand."

And he looked as if he did not. As if it were impossible to take in the words or their sense. John Hamos continued.

"It seems, sir, that on the Sunday it was discovered that her ladyship had sustained some internal injury — to the ribs, I believe, or near-about — and she had to submit to an operation. Chloroform was given her while it was performed, and she never rallied from it."

"Who gave her the chloroform?"

"Dr. Davenal."

"Dr. Davenal!" echoed Mr. Oswald Cray, and his accent of astonishment was so great, so unmistakable, that the landlord looked at him in surprise. "Why, he — he —"

"What, sir?"

Oswald had brought his words to a sudden standstill. His face was one picture of doubt, of bewilderment.

"It could not have been Dr. Davenal."

"Yes it was, sir," repeated John Hamos. "Who else would be likely to undertake the operation but him? He and Mr. Cray were together, but it was the doctor who performed it. As of course it would be."

"But he did not give the chloroform?"

"Why, yes he did, sir. He gave it for the best. As was said afterwards at the inquest, they could not possibly foresee that what saved pain and was a blessing to thousands, would prove fatal to her ladyship."

"Who said that at the inquest? Dr. Davenal?"

"Mr. Cray, sir. The doctor wasn't present at the inquest,

he was away from the town. He went away in the night, somebody said, just after the death: was fetched out to some patient at a distance, and didn't get back here till — Wednesday morning, I think it was."

"And she never rallied from the chloroform?"

"Never at all, sir. She died under it."

Oswald Cray said no more. He went up to the bed-room that he always used, there to wash off some of the travelling dust. But instead of proceeding at once to do so, he stood in thought with folded arms and bent brow, John Hamos's information respecting the chloroform troubling his brain.

Why should it trouble him? Could not he believe, as others did, that it was given in all due hope and confidence, according to the best judgment of the surgeons? No, he could not believe it, so far as regarded the chief surgeon, Dr. Davenal: and the reason was this.

On the night of the accident, when Dr. Davenal jumped into the carriage that was about to proceed to the scene, he jumped into a seat by the side of Oswald Cray. They entered into conversation, and the topic of it was, not unnaturally, accidents in general. It led to the subject of chloroform, and Dr. Davenal expressed his opinion upon that new-fashioned aid to science, just as freely as he afterwards expressed it to Mark Cray.

How strange are the incidents, the small events that shape the course of human destiny! But for that accidental conversation — and may it not be called accidental? — half the trouble that is about to be related never would have taken place. And the cruel shadow, that was waiting to spread its wings over the days of more than one wayfarer on the path of life, would have found no spot to darken with its evil.

Dr. Davenal spoke his opinion freely to Oswald Cray with regard to chloroform. He did not deny its great boon, sparing

pain to many whose sufferings would otherwise be almost intolerable; but he said that there were some few to whom he would as soon give poison as chloroform, for the one would be just as fatal as the other. And he instanced Lady Oswald.

The unfortunate fact of Lady Oswald being in the disabled train to which they were hastening, possibly one of its wounded, no doubt suggested her name to Dr. Davenal as his example. There were other people whom he attended — a slight few — to whom he deemed chloroform would be as pernicious as to Lady Oswald: but she was in question, as it were, that night, and he cited her. There must have been some fatality in it.

“She is one, if I am any judge, who could not bear it; who would be almost certain not to survive its effects,” were the words he used to Oswald. “I would as soon give Lady Oswald a dose of poison as suffer her to come near chloroform.”

The words, spoken to Oswald only, not to the other inmates of the carriage who were busy talking on their own score, had not made any particular impression upon him at the time, but they returned to his memory now with awakened force. He asked himself what it could mean. Dr. Davenal had distinctly told him, or equivalent to it, that the inhaling of chloroform would be as poison to Lady Oswald; he was now assured by John Hamos that, not four-and-twenty hours subsequent to that conversation, he, Dr. Davenal, had himself administered chloroform to her. And the result was death. Death — as Dr. Davenal had expressed his firm conviction it would be.

Mr. Oswald Cray could only come to the conclusion that there must be some mistake in the statement of the facts to him. It was impossible to arrive at any other conclusion. That there was no mistake on his own part, as to the opinion

expressed to him by the doctor, he knew; he recalled the very words in which it was spoken; spoken deliberately and elaborately; not a mere allusion or sentence. About that, there was no doubt; but he felt that a mistake must lie somewhere. The chloroform could not have been given by Dr. Davenal; perhaps he had not even been present at the operation.

He quitted the Apple Tree, and bent his steps to Lady Oswald's. Parkins came to him in a burst of grief. Parkins was — it has been said so before — genuinely grieved at her lady's death, and it showed itself chiefly by breaking into a shower of tears with every fresh person she saw. One of the first questions put to her by Mr. Oswald Cray was as to her not having written to inform him of the death. He wished to know why she had not.

"I don't know why, sir," she sobbed, "except that I have been bewildered ever since it happened. I have been as one out of my mind, sir, with the shock and the grief. I'm sure I beg your pardon for the neglect, but it never so much as struck me till yesterday, when the undertaker was here about the funeral. He asked who was to be invited to it, and then it came into my mind that you ought to have been wrote to, but I said perhaps Mr. Cray had done it."

"Well, sit down while you talk, Parkins," he said in a kind tone. "I can understand that you have been very much shocked by it. Are any of Lady Oswald's relatives here?"

"There's that nephew of hers, sir, the parson; the poor gentleman that she'd send a little money to sometimes. He heard of it accidental, he says, and came off at once with his brother. They got here this morning. Very nice people, both of them, sir, but they seem poor. They think no doubt

that my lady's money is left to them, as I dare say it is. She ——”

“I wish to ask you a question or two about the death, Parkins,” he interrupted in a pointed manner. None could check undue topics with more dignity than he. “When was it discovered that Lady Oswald was seriously injured?”

“Not until the Sunday, sir. When Mr. Cray came home with her here on the return from Hildon, he wanted to examine into her state, but she was very obstinate, and persisted in saying she'd not be touched that night; that she wasn't hurt. I fancy Dr. Davenal thought it was wrong of Mr. Cray not to have insisted upon it — but Mr. Cray himself did not think there was any grave injury: he told me so then. The next morning I thought they'd both be here, Dr. Davenal and Mr. Cray; but Mr. Cray came alone, the doctor it appeared had been sent for to Thorndyke ——”

“To Thorndyke?” involuntarily interrupted Oswald.

“Yes, sir, somebody was ill there. However, he, the doctor, was back and up here in the afternoon. He had seen Mr. Cray, and he came to examine into her state for himself: for it had been discovered then that she was worse injured than they thought. At first my lady said she'd not submit to the operation, which Mr. Cray had already told her must take place; but Dr. Davenal talked to her, and she consented, and they fixed half-past five in the afternoon. Have you heard how she died, sir?” broke off Parkins abruptly.

“I have heard since I got here this evening that she died from the effects of chloroform.”

“And so she did, sir. And it's a thing that I shall never understand to my dying day.”

Parkins spoke the last words with a vehemence that superseded the sobs. Mr. Oswald Cray thought he did not understand it either; but he did not say so.

"In what way don't you understand it?" he asked quietly.

"How it was they came to give her the chloroform. I am quite certain, sir, that up to the very moment that the operation was ready to be begun, there was no thought of chloroform. It was not as much as mentioned, and if any chloroform had been in the room amidst the preparations, I must have seen it."

"Were you present during the operation?"

"I was to have been present, sir; but at the last moment I fainted dead off, and had to be taken from the room. We knew no more, any of us, till it was all over. Then we were called to by the gentlemen, and told what was the matter: that my lady was sinking under the influence of the chloroform they had administered, and could not be rallied from it. And, a few minutes after, she died."

Oswald Cray remained for some moments silent. "Was it Dr. Davenal who administered it?" he resumed.

"No doubt it was, sir; they were together. It was Dr. Davenal who performed the operation. My lady said nobody should do it but Mr. Cray, and it was settled that it should be done by him; but I suppose they thought at last it would be better to entrust it to the doctor. Any way, it was he who performed it."

"What did Dr. Davenal — did Dr. Davenal say anything about the chloroform afterwards, or why they had used it?"

"He didn't say much, sir. He said what had been done was done for the best: but he seemed dreadfully cut up. And so did Mr. Cray. The strangest thing to me is, why they used chloroform, when I saw no signs of their attempting to use it."

"But they must have had it with them?"

"Well, of course they must, sir. It was not produced, though, while I was there. They said my lady grew agitated

— it was Mr. Cray said that — that my falling down helped to agitate her; but it will take a great deal to make me believe there was any *need* for them to use chloroform. It has cost a good lady her life; I know that. She had her little tempers and her fidgety ways, poor dear lady, but she was one of the best of mistresses. It's just as if they had done it to kill her."

Did the words grate on the ear of Oswald Cray? — as though they bore all too significant a meaning. Not yet; not quite yet. This testimony of the maid's had confirmed beyond doubt that Dr. Davenal had been the chief and acting surgeon: how then reconcile that fact with the opinion expressed to him not many hours before the death? He could not tell; he could not think; he could not account for it by any reasoning of any sort, subtle or simple. He was as one in a mazy dream, seeing nothing distinctly.

When he quitted the house, he turned again and bent his steps to the abbey. Possibly he deemed Mark could solve his difficulties. Mark was not in however when he got there, only Caroline.

Mrs. Cray was in the large drawing-room. She and the tea-table, at which she sat waiting for Mark, looked quite lost in its space. The thought struck Oswald as he entered. It had been the home of his early childhood, the scene of occasional visits since that period, but Oswald always thought that room larger and larger every time he entered it. It was at its window that he, a baby in arms, had been held by the side of his mother, when the grand people from Thorndyke in their carriage and four, *her* father and mother, would drive past and cast up their faces of stone. He had been too young to know anything then, but afterwards, when he could begin to understand, these stories of the passing by of Sir Oswald Oswald were impressed upon him by his nurse. They remained

amidst his most vivid recollections. But that he knew it was impossible to have been so — for his mother had died when he was too young, and there was no more standing there after her death to watch for Sir Oswald — he could have affirmed now that he remembered those times in all their full detail: the steady pace of the fine horses, the bedizened carriage — in those days it was the fashion to have carriages bedizened — the servants in their claret liveries, the impassive faces of Sir Oswald and his lady. The fact was, it had all been described so often and minutely to the young child Oswald, that it remained on his memory as a thing seen, not heard.

Mrs. Cray, gay in attire, wearied in countenance, was quite alone. She wore a low evening dress of blue silk, with lace and fringes and trimmings; and blue ribbons in her hair. Rather more dress than is necessary for a quiet evening at home; but she was young and pretty and a bride, and — very fond of finery in any shape. Her weary face lighted up with smiles as she saw Oswald and rose to greet him: very, very pretty did she look then.

“I am so glad to see you! I had grown tired, waiting for Mark. He went out the moment he had swallowed his dinner — before he had swallowed it, I think — and he is not in yet. Shall I tell you a secret, Oswald?”

“Yes, if you please.”

“I am quite disappointed. I shan’t at all like being a doctor’s wife.”

Her dark blue eyes were dancing with smiles as she spoke. Oswald smiled too — at the joke.

“It is true, Mr. Oswald Cray. I don’t speak against my own dear Mark: I’d not part with *him*: but I do wish he was not a doctor. You don’t know how little I see of him. He is in just at meals, and not always to them.”

Oswald smiled still. "You had lived in a doctor's house, Mrs. Cray, and knew the routine of it."

"My uncle's house was not like this. Who can compare the great Dr. Davenal at the top of the tree, waiting at home for his patients to come to him, to poor Mark Cray at the bottom, just beginning to climb it? It's not the same thing, Mr. Oswald Cray. Mark has to be out, here and there and everywhere. At the infirmary, dancing attendance on interminable rows of beds one hour; in some obscure corner of the town another, setting somebody's leg, or watching a case of fever. Mark says it won't go on quite as bad as it has begun. This has been an unusually busy week with him, owing to the doctor's absence. He left home on Sunday night, and was not back until Wednesday. A great portion of Sunday also the doctor passed at Thorndyke."

"His patient must have been very ill to keep him away from Sunday until Wednesday," remarked Oswald.

"To tell you the truth," said Caroline, dropping her voice in a manner that sounded rather mysterious, "we don't think he was with a patient. We can't quite make out why he went or where he went. He came here in the middle of the night and rang up Mark. It was the night subsequent to Lady Oswald's death — O, Oswald! was not her death a shocking thing?"

"Very," was the answer, gravely spoken.

"When Mark came home that Sunday evening and told me Lady Oswald was dead, I cannot describe to you how I felt. At first I could not believe it; and then I went — I went into hysterics. It was very foolish of course, for hysterics do no good, but I could not help it. You have come down to attend the funeral to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well — I was telling you about my uncle. He came here

in the middle of the night and rang up Mark, who went down to him. When Mark came up-stairs again, he said Dr. Davenal was going away on some private errand which he had made a sort of secret of to Mark. I fancy Mark was only half awake and did not hear him clearly: all he understood was, that the doctor was going somewhere by train unexpectedly; and Mark was to let it be assumed in the town that he was visiting a patient at a distance. Mark declared that he believed the doctor was only absenting himself to avoid attending the corone's inquest."

"Why should Mark think that? — Why should Dr. Davenal wish to avoid attending it?" reiterated Oswald, strangely interested, he scarcely knew why.

"I cannot tell you. I fancy the admission slipped from Mark inadvertently, for he would not say a syllable more. The next day, Monday, I saw Sara. I asked her point blank where my uncle had gone, remarking that there seemed to be some little mystery connected with it, and she turned as white as the grave and whispered to me not to talk so, to hold my tongue for the love of Heaven. You'll take some tea, won't you, Oswald? I shall be so glad of an excuse for making it."

Oswald, almost mechanically, said he would take some, and she rang the bell for the urn. He began to think all this strange and more strange; to ask himself what it tended to. Dr. Davenal had gone away to avoid the inquest? — and his daughter when spoken to upon the subject had turned as white as the grave? What did it mean?

"Do you know the particulars of Lady Oswald's death?" he inquired as he stirred his tea.

"Yes. Don't you? She died from chloroform. They deemed it necessary to give it her, and she never rallied from it."

"Who gave it to her? Which of them?"

"Which of them?" repeated Caroline, lifting her eyes, thinking no doubt the question a superfluous one. "They were both present, they would act in concert one with the other. If you mean to cast blame on them, Oswald, I should say you must cast it conjointly. But they acted for the best."

"I do not cast blame on them," he answered. "I don't understand the affair sufficiently yet to cast blame anywhere. It is a riddle to me."

"What is a riddle?"

"How Dr. — how they came to use chloroform at all."

"Why, it is in almost universal use now!" exclaimed Mrs. Cray, surprised at the remark. "There is no riddle in that."

Oswald did not press it. In his opinion there *was* a riddle; one he began to think would not be easy of solution. He finished his tea in silence. By and by Mrs. Cray resumed.

"Mark seems not to like to talk of it. I asked him a great many questions, as was natural, but he put me off, saying I should be falling into hysterics again. I told him that was nonsense, now the shock was over; but he would not talk of it, seemed quite to wince when I pressed it. It was not a pleasant subject for him, he said. And of course it is not: and still less so for my uncle, whose authority sways Mark. However good their intentions were, it did kill her."

"Will Mark be long, do you suppose?" inquired Oswald, breaking another long pause.

"As if I could tell, Oswald! I have been expecting him every minute this hour past. When I grumble at Mark for staying out so, he tells me I must blame his patients. Nay, but you are not going yet!" she added, as he rose. "Mark is sure to be in soon."

"I cannot well stay longer now," he answered. "I shall see Mark in the morning. I suppose he attends the funeral?"

"Of course he will. They will both attend it. I wish you would not hurry away!"

He repeated his apology, and Caroline rang the bell. In point of fact he wanted to call on Dr. Davenal.

Scarcely had the servant closed the door on Mr. Oswald Cray than he met his brother. Mark was coming along at a quick pace.

"Oswald, is it you! Have you been to the abbey?"

"I have been taking tea with your wife, and waiting for you. She is nearly out of patience. Mark!" he continued, passing his arm within his brother's and leading him a few steps away while he talked, "what a shocking thing this is about Lady Oswald!"

"Ay, it is that. So unexpected. Won't you come in?"

"Not again to-night. I want to know, Mark, how it was that chloroform was given to her?"

"If we had not deemed it for the best, we should not have given it," was Mark's answer.

"But surely Dr. Davenal did not deem it would be for the best?"

Mark turned and looked at him: a quick, sharp glance. "What do you know about it?" he asked.

"I? I know nothing about it: I want to know," replied Oswald, thinking the remark strange. "I wish you would give me the full particulars, Mark. I cannot understand — I have a reason for not being able to understand — why chloroform should have been given to Lady Oswald—"

"We use chloroform very much now," interrupted Mark.

"Why it should have been given to *Lady Oswald*," went on Oswald, with pointed emphasis.

"It was given to her as it is given to others — to deaden pain."

"Who performed the operation?"

"The doctor."

There was a pause. When Oswald Cray broke it his voice was low, his manner hesitating. "Mark, will you pardon me if I ask you a peculiar question? — Do you believe from your very heart that when Dr. Davenal administered that chloroform to Lady Oswald, he *did* think it would be for the best?"

Hesitating as Oswald's manner had been, Mark's was worse. He grew on a sudden flushed and embarrassed.

"Won't you answer me, Mark?"

"I — yes — of course we thought it would be for the best."

"I asked, did *he* think it?"

Mark plunged into an untruth. Somewhat afraid of Oswald at the best of times, conscious that he was of a far higher standard in moral and intellectual excellence than himself, he desired to stand well with him, to enjoy his good opinion; and perhaps there was not a single man in Hallingham to whom Mark would not have preferred his unhappy mistake in all its wilfulness to become known, than to his brother. They were also playing at cross purposes: Oswald was seeking to learn how far Dr. Davenal had been to blame. Mark believed it was his own share of blame that was sought to be arrived at.

"Yes, he thought it. Dr. Davenal would not use chloroform, or anything else, unless he believed it would be beneficial," rapidly went on Mark. "I never knew a man more successful in his treatment in a general way than he." But for all the apparent readiness of the words, they bore a certain evasion to Oswald's ears.

"Tell me the truth, Mark; tell it me frankly," he rejoined. "Is there not some — some secret — I don't know what else to call it — connected with this business? Something *wrong* about it?"

For a moment Mark Cray had to deliberate. He was driven at bay by the straightforward questions of his brother. And his brother saw the hesitation.

"Oswald, it is of no use to press me upon this matter. You will readily conceive how sore a one it is to myself and to Dr. Davenal. Had it been some poor rubbishing patient who had died through it, that poor stoker at the infirmary for instance, it would not have been of so much account: but" —

"Be silent, Mark!" burst from Oswald with a flash of anger. "I will not listen to such doctrine. The lives of the poor are every whit as valuable as are the lives of the rich. You did not learn that from Dr. Davenal."

"What I meant was, that there'd not be half the public fuss," said Mark, looking little, and doing his best to explain away the impression given by his words. "I'm sure there *has* been enough fuss in the town since her death was known, but I have not heard of one single person in it casting blame on us. Why should you seek to cast it? Errors in judgment are committed now and then in medical practice, just as they are in everything else, and there's no help for it; they happen to the very best of us. If we could see the end of a thing at the beginning it would be different: but we can't. Could its effects on Lady Oswald have been anticipated, we'd have seen chloroform in the sea before it should have been given her. It was done for the best."

"You think then that Dr. Davenal believed the giving it her would be for the best?" persisted Oswald, after listening patiently to the excited answer.

Again came the perceptible hesitation in the manner of Mark, again the flush of embarrassment rose to his cheek. Oswald noted it.

"I am quite sure that all the doctor ever did for Lady Oswald, he did for the best," and Mark Cray plucked up

courage and spirit as he said it: "that night, as well as other nights which had gone before it. I cannot think what you are driving at, Oswald."

Oswald Cray determined to "drive" no more. He believed it would be useless, so far as Mark was concerned. He could not quite make him out: but he believed it would be useless. That there was something concealed, something not quite open, he saw; Mark's manner alone would have told him that: and he came rapidly to the conclusion that Mark had been cognisant also of his partner's opinion of chloroform as connected with Lady Oswald, and could not tell why he had tried it upon her, but did suppose, in spite of the face of affairs, that he had done it for the best. All Mark's embarrassment, his evasion, his crusty unwillingness to speak frankly, Oswald set down to an anxiety to screen Dr. Davenal from the reproach of imprudence. One more remark he did make. It arose to his mind as he was about to depart, and he spoke it on the spur of the thought.

"I understand you fancy that Dr. Davenal absented himself from Hallingham to avoid attending the coroner's inquest."

"Where on earth did you hear that?" shouted Mark, with a stare of surprise.

"Your wife mentioned it to me just now."

Mark Cray waxed wroth. "What idiots women are! The very best of them! I shan't be able to think my own thoughts next. Caroline knows I did not wish that repeated: it slipped from me without reflection."

"It is quite safe with me, Mark. She looks upon me I suppose as one of yourselves. But why should Dr. Davenal have wished not to attend the inquest?"

"Oh, for nothing, only he thought they'd be putting all sorts of questions," carelessly replied Mark. "It was a dis-

agreeable thing altogether, and one of us was quite enough to attend. But, mind you, Oswald, I don't really suppose he went for that: I make no doubt he had business out."

"Well, good-night, Mark."

"Good-night. I wish you had come in."

Mark Cray stepped on to his house, and let himself in with his latch-key, thinking how much better the world would go on if women had not been endowed with tongues, and wondering excessively what possessed Oswald to be taking up the death of Lady Oswald and putting these mysterious questions upon it.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Interview with the Doctor.

DR. DAVENAL was alone in his study, pacing the carpet with heavy steps and a face that seemed to have all the care of the world marked on it, when Mr. Oswald Cray was shown in. Oswald could not avoid being struck with that expression of care; he had never seen the like upon the countenance of Dr. Davenal.

Turning his head, he looked at Oswald for the space of a minute as if not recognising him. He was too deeply buried in his own thoughts immediately to awake from them to everyday life.

"Good-evening, Dr. Davenal."

He took Oswald's outstretched hand, and was himself again. Oswald sat down and the doctor too. But after a few words, he rose, apparently in restlessness, and began to pace the room as before.

"Are you in any grief, doctor?"

"Well — yes I am," was the reply. "Or perhaps I should rather say in vexation, for that is chiefly it. We have had a

line from Edward by the day post, and he expresses a doubt whether he shall be able to get down to say farewell. These young soldiers grow careless of home ties, Mr. Oswald Cray."

"Not soldiers in particular, do they, sir? It is a reproach that can be cast upon many others who live in the world."

"And get enslaved by it. True."

"I did not mean altogether that, Dr. Davenal. When does your son sail?"

"On Sunday morning, he says. He does not positively say he is not coming down, only gives a hint that he fears he cannot. What did I do with the letter?" continued the doctor, looking round. "I brought it in with me after dinner. Oh, there it is," he added, seeing it on a side table, and giving it to Oswald. "You can read what he says. Sara won't mind. It is written for us all as well as for her, I expect. Edward was never a voluminous correspondent: his letters are generally *pro bono publico*."

Oswald saw it was addressed to Miss Sara Davenal, and began to read it. It was dated the previous evening.

"MY DARLING SISTER, —

"We are in all the bustle and hurry of the start. Orders have come at last, and we embark from Southampton on Sunday morning, I *hope* I shall get down to you to say good-bye. I am not unmindful of my promise to do so, and will do all I can to keep it: poor Dick used to tell me that I knew how to break promises better than I knew how to make them, but it shall not be my fault if you have to cast that on me as a last reproach. To absent one's-self, even for an hour, is a difficult task now, but I will manage it, if possible. We have been worked off our heads and legs for the last few days."

"Love to all. I suppose Carry is fairly installed at the

abbey; wish her all good luck for me. — Ever yours, in much haste,
E. F. DAVENAL."

"You see," said the doctor, halting and pointing to the letter, "he emphasises the word 'hope.' '*I hope* I shall get down.' That very fact is sufficient to tell me that he knows he shall not get down, and these lines have been sent as a sort of preparation for the final disappointment. And he is going out for years! But I won't blame him: perhaps it is an impossibility to him to get away. He should have remained longer when he came down for the wedding, have made it his farewell visit. I said so then."

Dr. Davenal began his walk to and fro again, — a very slow, thoughtful walk. Oswald folded the letter and laid it on the table.

"I have ever loved my children — I was going to say passionately, Mr. Oswald Cray. I believe few parents can love as I have loved. I have made — I have made sacrifices for them which the world little recks of, and anything like ingratitude touches me to the heart's core. But in the midst of it I am the first to find excuses for them, and I say that Edward may not be at all to blame in this."

"I think it very likely that he is quite unable to get away, however much he may wish it," observed Oswald.

"I think so too. I say I don't blame him. Only one feels these things."

There ensued a silence. A feeling of dislike had come over Oswald (and he could not trace it to any particular cause) to enter upon the subject of Lady Oswald. But he was not one to give way to these fanciful phases of feeling which appear to arise without rhyme or reason, and he was about to speak when the doctor forestalled him.

"Lady Oswald's death has brought you down, I presume?"

"Yes. I was in ignorance of it until this morning, when a formal invitation to attend the funeral reached me from the undertaker. I had just read the announcement of the death in the 'Times.' How shocked I was, I cannot well express to you."

"It has shocked us all."

"Of course its reaching me in that abrupt manner, in the public column of deaths, did not tend to lessen the shock. I rather wonder you did not drop me a line yourself, Dr. Davenal."

"I was away afterwards. Called out to a distance, I did not get back for a day or two. Did Mark not write?"

"Nobody wrote. Neither Mark nor Parkins; nor anybody else. As to Mark, he is careless as the wind; and Parkins excuses herself on the plea of having been so bewildered. I can readily believe her. Dr. Davenal, she died, as I am given to understand, from the effects of chloroform!"

"We thought, on the night of the accident, you know, that she was not seriously injured," said Dr. Davenal. "At least, Mark thought it: I had my doubts: but I left him to see to her at her own desire. Unfortunately I was called out early on Sunday morning. I was wanted at Thorndyke: and when I got back the injury had been ascertained, and an operation found necessary. It was under that operation she died."

"But the operation was performed successfully?"

"Quite so."

"And what she died of was the inhaling of the chloroform?"

"It was."

"But — I cannot understand why chloroform should have been given to her?" deliberately proceeded Oswald.

"It *was* given to her," was all the reply he obtained.

"But — pardon me for recalling it to you, Dr. Davenal — do you remember the very decided opinion you expressed to me, when we were going down to the scene of accident, against giving chloroform to Lady Oswald? We were speaking of its opposite effects upon different natures, and you cited Lady Oswald as one to whom, in your opinion, it might prove dangerous. You stated that, so far as you believed, it would be neither better nor worse to her than poison."

Oswald waited for a reply, but the doctor made none. He was pacing the small room with his measured tread, his hands in his pockets, his eyes bent on the carpet.

"Have you any objection to explain to me this apparent contradiction? It is impossible to believe that one, whose opinion of chloroform in relation to her was so fatal, would in a few hours cause her to inhale it."

Dr. Davenal stopped in his walk and confronted Oswald.

"Have you seen Mark since you came down?"

"Yes."

"And what does he say?"

"Well, I don't fancy he understands it much better than I do. He reiterates that it was given her for the best. In his opinion it may have been. But it surely could not have been in yours, Dr. Davenal."

Dr. Davenal turned from Oswald to his pacing again. A strong temptation was upon him to tell Oswald the truth. O that he had! that he had!

There were few people in the world whom he esteemed as he esteemed Oswald Cray. There was no one else in the world to whom he had expressed this opinion of the unfitness of Lady Oswald as a subject for chloroform, and the wish to

explain, to exonerate himself, arose forcibly within him. The next moment he asked himself why Mark Cray himself had not spoken. As he had not, it seemed to Dr. Davenal that it would be a breach of friendship, of *partnership*, for him to speak. Oswald was connected, too, with Lady Oswald, and might take up the matter warmly. No, he felt in his ever-considerate heart that he could not betray Mark, could not set one brother against the other. And he put the temptation from him.

Oswald watched him as he walked, wondering at the silence. A silence which the doctor evidently did not feel inclined to break.

"Do you remember expressing this opinion to me, Dr. Davenal?"

"Yes, I believe I did so express it."

"And yet you acted in diametrical opposition to it immediately afterwards, and caused Lady Oswald to inhale chloroform? Will you forgive me for again asking how it could have been?"

"The very best of us are led into error sometimes," replied Dr. Davenal.

"Why, that is one of the remarks Mark has just made to me in connection with this case! I cannot recognise it as applying to it. You spoke so firmly, so positively, that I should have believed there was no room for error to creep in. I feel that there is something to be explained, Dr. Davenal."

Dr. Davenal wheeled round in his walk and confronted Oswald.

"There are circumstances connected with this case, Mr. Oswald Cray, which I cannot explain to the world; which I cannot explain even to you; although I would rather tell them to you than to any one. Let it suffice to know that *I could not save Lady Oswald*. It was not in my power."

"But you could have saved — you could have helped giving her the chloroform?" returned Oswald, wonderingly.

A slight pause. "Will you oblige me by asking no further questions on the subject — by allowing it to drop, to me and to others? Believe me, I have no selfish motive in pressing this. No one living can regret more than I the fatal result to Lady Oswald; perhaps nobody regrets it so keenly. Could I have saved her, no care, no skill, no labour, should have been spared. But I could not. I can only ask you to be satisfied with this meagre assurance, Mr. Oswald Cray; and to believe me when I state that I have private reasons for declining to pursue the topic."

"And — pardon me — one more question: To what am I to attribute her death in my own mind? Or rather, this giving of the chloroform?"

"You must look upon it as an error in judgment. It was such."

It was impossible for Oswald Cray, as a gentleman, to press further the matter. Dr. Davenal was an old man compared with him; one of high reputation, skill, position. He could not understand it, but he could only bow to the request — nay, to the demand — and let the subject sink into silence. An awkward pause ensued. The doctor had not resumed his promenade, but stood under the gas-lamp, twirling a quill pen in his fingers which he had taken up.

"How are the other sufferers from the accident getting on?" inquired Oswald, when the silence was beginning to be heard.

"Oh, quite well. Poor Bigg the fireman is nearly the only one of them left in the infirmary, and he will soon be out of it. The rest came off mostly with a few cuts and bruises. There's a summons for me, I suppose."

The doctor alluded to a knock at the hall door. Neal came in.

"Mr. Wheatley, sir. He wishes to know if you can spare him ten minutes."

"Yes," replied the doctor, and Oswald rose.

"Will you walk upstairs and see them?"

"Not to-night, thank you."

"I won't press you," said the doctor. "Sara is cut up about this news from Edward, terribly disappointed; and Aunt Bett is as cross as two sticks. She is fond of Edward, with all her ungraciousness to him, and she looks upon this hint of not coming down as a slight to herself. In manner she was always ungracious to the boys, from some idea I believe that it tended to keep them in order. But she loved them at heart. Good-night."

Dr. Davenal clasped his hand with a warm pressure, warmer than usual; Oswald could not but feel it, and he went out perfectly mystified.

Neal stepped on to open the front gate. Neal was always remarkably courteous and deferent to Mr. Oswald Cray. Oswald, who had only seen the best side of Neal and never suspected there was a reverse one, looked upon him as a man to be respected, a faithful old retainer of the Oswald family. Lady Oswald had sung his praises times out of number in Oswald's ear, and she once told Oswald to try for Neal, should he ever require a servant about his person, for he would find Neal a man of fidelity, worth his weight in gold. Oswald believed her. He believed Neal to be faithful and true; one whom doubt could not touch.

"This death of your late mistress is a very sad thing, Neal."

"O sir! I can't express to you how I have felt it. I'm sure

I can say that my lady was a true friend to me, the only one I had left."

"No, no, Neal. Not the only one. You may count a friend in me — if only in respect to the regard you were, I know, held in by Lady Oswald."

"Thank you, sir, greatly;" and honest Neal's eyes swam in tears as he turned them to Mr. Oswald Cray under the light of his master's professional gas-lamp. "Sir," he added, swaying forward the gate and dropping his voice as he approached nearer to Oswald, "how came that poison, that chloroform to be given to her?"

"I cannot tell; I cannot understand," replied Oswald, speaking upon impulse, not upon reflection.

"Sir, if I might dare to say a word" — and Neal glanced round with caution on all sides as he spoke — "I'd ask whether it was given in fairness?"

"What do you mean, Neal?"

"There's not a person in the world I'd venture to whisper such a thing to, sir, except yourself; but I doubt whether it *was* given in fairness. I have a reason for doubting it, sir; a particular reason. It makes me sick, sir, to think that there was some unfair play brought to work, and that it took her life."

"Unfair play on the part of whom?" asked Oswald.

"I am not sure that I dare say, sir, even to you. And it might be looked upon as — as — fancy on my part. One thing is certain, sir, that but for that chloroform being given to her, she'd be alive now."

"Dr. Davenal and Mr. Cray gave the chloroform, Neal," observed Mr. Oswald Cray, in a somewhat distant tone — for it was not to Neal he would admit any doubt, scarcely condescend to hear any, of the judgment of the surgeons. "They know better about such things than we do."

"Yes, sir," answered Neal, as drily as he dared. "Mr. Cray, I am sure, did *his* best, but he has not had the judgment and experience of my master. Any way, it seems it was the chloroform that killed her."

"As it has killed others before her — when administered in all deliberate judgment by surgeons of as high repute and practice as Dr. Davenal. The issues of life and death are not even in a doctor's hands, Neal. Good-night."

"Good-night to you, sir."

Oswald Cray walked slowly towards his temporary home, the "Apple Tree," half bewildered with the conjectural views opened out to him, and not the least with that last hint of Neal's. He could not get over that giving of the chloroform by Dr. Davenal in the very teeth of his expressed opinion against it. He had supposed, when he first heard of the cause of death, that this contradiction would be explained away: but, instead of that, it was more unexplainable than before. There was Mark's confused manner, his covert attempts to avoid inquiry; there was Dr. Davenal's positive denial to satisfy it; there was the man Neal's curious hint. Oswald Cray felt as one in a maze, trying to get at something which eluded his grasp.

How the imagination runs riot, how utterly unamenable it is to the rules and regulations of sober control, we most of us know.

Oswald found his mind balancing the question, "Did Richard Davenal give that chloroform in his calm deliberate senses, believing that it might take her life? If so, where was the motive?" Men don't do such things in these days without a motive; the greatest criminal must have *that*. Oswald Cray could see none. There was no motive, or shadow of motive, for Dr. Davenal's wishing for the death of Lady Oswald. Quite the contrary; it was his interest — if so worldly a plea

may be brought into proximity with these solemn thoughts — to keep her in life. Of all his patients, she perhaps was the most profitable, paying him a good sum yearly. Then — with the want of motive, those dark doubts born of his imagination fell to the ground, and he had the good sense to see that they did.

They fell to the ground. And Oswald Cray, as he awoke with a start and shook himself clear of them, pinched his arms to see whether he was awake. Surely only in his sleep could doubts, such as those, have arisen of Dr. Davenal!

CHAPTER XXII.

The Will.

SARA DAVENAL in her sick restlessness was early in the breakfast-room. The disappointment touching her brother was weighing down her heart. Since the arrival of the unsatisfactory note the previous evening, she had felt a conviction similar to Dr. Davenal's, that Edward would not come. Neither had spoken of it to the other; great griefs cannot be talked of; and to Sara this was a grief inexpressible. It seemed that she would give half her remaining years of life for only one five minutes' interview with him.

If he came at all he would come to-day, Friday; and she got up, hoping against hope; saying to herself aloud, in contradiction to the fear lying upon her heart, and which she *would not* glance at, "He will be sure to come; he will never embark on that long voyage without first coming. He will remember Richard's fate." For the time being, the eager anxiety to see him almost seemed to deaden that other trouble which lay within her — the trouble that had taken possession of her on the Sunday night, never again to quit its tenement.

"Is the post in?" asked Dr. Davenal, as he entered the breakfast-room.

"No, it is not made," sharply replied Miss Davenal from her presiding place at the table. "Neal has but this minute brought in the urn. I am making it quickly as I can."

"I asked whether the post was in, Bettina. Because, if Edward is not coming, I should think there'd be a letter from him."

Sara looked up eagerly. "Don't you hope he will come, papa? Don't you think he will?"

"Well, Sara, after his letter of last night, my hopes upon the point are not very strong."

"O papa! I want to see him! I must see him before he sails."

"Hush, child!" She had spoken in a distressed tone, and her small white hands were trembling. "Agitating yourself will not bring him."

By and by the letters came in: two. Neal handed one to his master, the other to Sara. Both bore the same handwriting — Captain Davenal's. Sara, in her bitter disappointment, let hers lie by her plate untouched, but the doctor opened his.

Miss Bettina looked up. "Is he coming, Richard?"

"No. He says he can't come. That it is an impossibility."

"What else does he say?"

Dr. Davenal folded his letter and put it in his pocket, to read at his leisure. "Ask Sara what he says," was his answer. "All the gossip is in hers."

"And this is what he calls affection!" exclaimed Miss Bettina. "To leave his native land, his home, without a farewell! That's gratitude! Richard Davenal, were I you, he should carry out my displeasure with him."

"I don't know," said the doctor, his voice sadly subdued. "Send out displeasure with one whom we may never see

again! No, Bettina. And it may be as he says — that he is unable to come.”

He was looking straight before him as he spoke it, in a far-off, dreamy gaze. His thoughts had flown to one who had gone out under a sort of displeasure, gone out but for a short time — and had never come home again.

The hour for the funeral approached, and the doctor in his black attire stepped into his close carriage to be conveyed to the residence of Lady Oswald. He found all the mourners assembled, for he was late, with the exception of Mark Cray. Sir Philip Oswald and his eldest son; Oswald Cray; the Reverend Mr. Stephenson and his brother Mr. Joseph Stephenson. All were there, now the doctor had come, except Mark. The funeral was to be at the church at eleven.

The time went on. The hearse and mourning coaches stood before the door, the horses restless. It was close upon eleven.

“For whom do we wait?” inquired Sir Philip Oswald.

“For Mr. Cray, Sir Philip,” answered the undertaker, who was gliding about, handing gloves and fixing hatbands.

“Mr. Cray?” repeated Sir Philip, as though he did not understand who Mr. Cray was.

“Lady Oswald’s late medical attendant, Sir Philip, in conjunction with Dr. Davenal.

“Oh — ah — yes,” said Sir Philip. He was very friendly with Dr. Davenal, exceedingly so; and condescended not to ignore Mr. Cray as the doctor’s partner. It was the first time that Oswald had ever been in a room with Sir Philip. Sir Philip had bowed to him coldly enough upon his entrance, but the son, Henry Oswald, went up to him and held out his hand in a cordial manner. Oswald, haughtily self-possessed, stood before Sir Philip with his impassive face, looking more of a gentleman than the baronet did.

The clock struck eleven. "I suppose Mr. Cray is coming?" remarked Sir Philip.

He looked at Dr. Davenal. The doctor supposed he was coming as a matter of course: he believed he was coming. He had not seen Mr. Cray that morning.

It was suggested by the undertaker that they should proceed. Mr. Cray, he observed, would possibly join them at the church; he might have been kept back unexpectedly.

So the funeral started. All that remained of poor Lady Oswald was carried out of her house, never more to return to it. Not a week ago yet, on that past Saturday morning, she had gone forth in health and strength, and now — there! What a lesson it told of the uncertainty of life!

The funeral made its way through lines of curious gazers to the church. Mark Cray was not there, and the service was performed without him. At its conclusion the gentlemen returned to the house.

A lawyer from a neighbouring town, Lady Oswald's legal adviser, was there with the will, and they were invited to enter and hear the will read.

"It cannot concern me," remarked Sir Philip. Nevertheless he went in.

"And I am sure it cannot concern me," added Oswald.

"The clergyman, Mr. Stephenson, looked up with a crimson hectic on his cheek. It was next to impossible to mistake his eager glance — betraying the hope within him, sure and steadfast, that it did concern him. In point of fact he and that gentleman by his side, his brother, had the chief right to any money she might have left. It may be said the sole right. How they needed it, their threadbare clothes and sunken cheeks betrayed. Gentlemen born, they had to keep up an appearance before the world; at least, they strove to keep it. But they were weary with the struggle. The brother

was of no particular profession. He had been reared for the church and could never get to college, and he contrived to make a living — that is, he contrived not to starve — by writing articles for any paper or periodical that could be persuaded into taking them. Each was of good repute in the world, bearing up manfully and doing the best he could do with his lot, sanguinely hoping, humbly trusting that time would better it. They, each, had a large family, and indulged the vain and wild hope of bringing up their sons as gentlemen, as they themselves had been brought up. Not as gentlemen in the matter of abstaining from labour; that would have been foolish; but they hoped to bring them up educated men, capable of doing their duty in any walk of life they might be called to. How they had looked forward to the prospect of some time possessing this money of Lady Oswald's, their heart's alone knew. If ever the excuse for cherishing such a wish could be pleaded, it surely might be by them.

"I suppose these people, the Stephensons, will chiefly inherit what she has left," whispered the baronet's son confidentially to Oswald Cray. "Perhaps you know? You have seen a good deal of Lady Oswald, I believe."

"I don't at all know how her affairs are left," was the reply of Oswald Cray.

"I should think they will inherit," continued Mr. Oswald. "Shouldn't you?"

"I should think — yes — I — should think they will. Being her only relatives, they have undoubtedly the greatest right to do so."

Why did Oswald Cray hesitate in his answer? — he so generally decisive of speech. Because in the very moment that the acquiescence was leaving his lips there flashed over his mind the words spoken to him by Lady Oswald the previous Saturday. He had not understood those words at the

time, did not understand them now: but if he could interpret them at all, they certainly did not point to her nephews, the brothers Stephenson. He remembered them well: at least, their substance. "When my will comes to be read, you may feel surprised at its contents. You may deem that you had more legal claim upon me than he who will inherit: I do not think so. He to whom my money is left has most claim in my judgment: I am happy to know that he will be rewarded, and he knows it."

Not a week ago! not a week ago that she had said it. How little did Oswald foresee that he should so soon be called upon to hear that will read!

But still the words did not seem to point to either of her nephews, with whom she had not lived on any terms of friendship, and Oswald began to feel a little curious as to the inheritor.

They were waiting for the lawyer, who had not yet come into the room. He might be getting the will. His name was Wedderburn, a stout man with a pimpled face. Sir Philip Oswald had a pimpled face too; but he was not stout: he was as thin and as tall as a lath.

Dr. Davenal took out his watch. He found it later than he thought, and turned to Sir Philip.

"I cannot remain longer," he said. "I have a consultation at half-past twelve, and must not miss it. I am not wanted here: there's nothing for me to stay for: so I'll wish you good-morning."

"For that matter, I don't see that any of us are wanted," responded Sir Philip. "I'm sure I am not. Good-morning, doctor."

Nodding his salutation to the room generally, the doctor went out. Soon afterwards Mr. Wedderburn made his appearance, the will in his hand, which he prepared to read.

Clearing his voice, he threw his eyes round the room, as if to see that his audience were ready. The absence of one appeared then to strike him, and he pushed his spectacles to the top of his brow and gazed again.

"Where's Dr. Davenal?"

"He is gone," replied Sir Philip Oswald.

"Gone!" repeated the lawyer, in consternation. "Why — he — Dr. Davenal should have stopped, of all people."

"He said he had a consultation. What does it signify?"

"Well, Sir Philip, he — at any rate, I suppose there's no help for it now. It must be read without him."

Not one present but looked at the lawyer with surprise, not one but thought him a strangely punctilious man to suppose Dr. Davenal's presence, as Lady Oswald's medical man and attendant at her funeral, was in any degree essential to the reading of Lady Oswald's will. They soon learned the cause.

First of all, the will bequeathed a few legacies. Very small ones. Twenty pounds to each of her servants; forty pounds and all her clothes to Parkins; fifty pounds each to her nephews John and Joseph Stephenson, with the furniture of her house to be divided between them "amicably;" a beautiful diamond ring and a little plate to Oswald Cray; the rest of the plate, by far the most valuable portion, to Sir Philip Oswald of Thorndyke; and another diamond ring to Dr. Richard Davenal. So far, so good: but now came the disposal of the bulk of her money. It was bequeathed, the whole of it, to Dr. Davenal, "my faithful friend and medical attendant for so many years."

The will was remarkably short, taking but a few minutes in the reading; and at its conclusion Mr. Wedderburn laid it open on the table that anybody might look at it who chose.

It would be difficult to say which of the countenances

around him exhibited the greatest surprise. The lawyer's voice died away in a deep silence. It was broken by the clergyman, the Reverend John Stephenson.

"It is not just! It is not just!"

The wailing tone, not of passion or anger but of meek despair, struck upon them all, and told how bitter was the disappointment. Every heart in the room echoed the cry, the lawyer's probably excepted. Lawyers, as a whole, don't think much of justice. This one took out his snuff-box and inhaled a pinch with equanimity.

"I am ready to answer questions, should any gentleman wish to put them. It was Lady Oswald's desire that I should. When this will was made, she said to me, 'Some of them will be for making a fuss, Wedderburn; you can explain my motives if they care to hear them.' Those motives lay in this; her ladyship knew her health and comfort to have been so materially benefited of late years by the skill and kindness of Dr. Davenal, that she considered it her duty in gratitude to reward him."

"Nevertheless it is not just," murmured the poor clergyman again. "Dr. Davenal does not want the money as we want it."

Oswald Cray awoke as from a dream. He took a step forward and addressed the lawyer. "Did Dr. Davenal know that the money was left to him?"

"I am unable to say, sir. Lady Oswald may have told him, or she may not. He did not know it from me."

Oswald Cray said no more. He leaned against the window, half hidden by the curtain, and plunged into thought.

"Well, I must say I am surprised," remarked Sir Philip. "Not but that Lady Oswald had a perfect right to do as she pleased with her money, and she might have signalled out a

less worthy man as inheritor. How much is the amount, Mr. Wedderburn? Do you know?"

"Somewhere between six and seven thousand pounds, I believe, Sir Philip. It would have been considerably more, but that her ladyship, a few years ago, was persuaded by an evil counsellor to sell out a large sum from the funds and invest elsewhere, for the sake of better interest."

"And she lost it?"

"Every shilling," replied the lawyer, with satisfaction: for it was done without his concurrence. "She would have had double the money to leave behind her but for that."

"Ah!" Sir Philip spoke the monosyllable shortly, and dropped the point. Not so very long ago, *he* had been seduced to invest money in some grand and very plausible scheme — one of those to be heard of daily, promising a fortune in twelve months at the most — and he had burnt his fingers. The topic, consequently, was not palatable to his ears.

"Ask him how long this will has been made, John," whispered the literary man to his brother. Of a retiring, timid nature himself, he rarely spoke but when he was obliged, and he shrank from putting the question. The clergyman obeyed, and the lawyer pointed to the date of the will.

"Only in April last. Lady Oswald was fond of making wills. Some people are so. I have made her, I should think, half-a-dozen, if I have made one."

"And the bulk of the money was always left to Dr. Davenal?"

"O dear no. It never was left to him until this last was made."

"Was I — were we — was it ever left to us?" asked the poor clergyman, tremblingly.

"Yes it was," replied Mr. Wedderburn. "I don't see why I should not avow it. It can't make any difference, one way

or the other. In the first will she ever made after Sir John's death it was left to you. And in the last will preceding this, it was again left to you. Once it was left" — the lawyer looked towards the window — "to Mr. Oswald Cray."

Oswald gave his shoulders a haughty shrug. "I should never have accepted the legacy," he said in a distinct, deliberate tone. "I had no claim whatever to Lady Oswald's money, and should not have taken it."

Henry Oswald laughed; a pleasant, cordial laugh as he turned to Oswald. "You don't know, Mr. Oswald Cray. We are all so ready to be chivalrous in theory: but when it comes to practice — the best of us are apt to fall off."

"True," quietly remarked Oswald: but he did not pursue the theme.

There was nothing more to be said or done then. Of what profit to remain talking of the wills that had been, while the present one was before them and must be put in force? Sir Philip made the first move; he went out, taking a formal leave; Henry Oswald, with a more cordial one. Oswald Cray was the next to leave. He shook hands with the brothers, and spoke a few kind words of sympathy for their disappointment.

"It is the disappointment of a life," replied the clergyman in a low tone. "Our struggle has been continued long; and we had — there's no denying it — looked forward to this. It is a hard trial when relatives find themselves passed over for strangers."

"It is, it is," said Oswald Cray. "I could wish Lady Oswald had been more mindful of legitimate claims."

As he was going out, Parkins waylaid him in her new mourning. "There will be a dinner ready at five o'clock, sir. Would you be pleased to stay for it?"

"Not to-day," replied Oswald.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Neal's Visit.

CAUSING the sweeping crape to be taken from his hat, for he preferred to depart on foot, Oswald Cray proceeded through the town to the house of his brother. Just as he reached the door, Mark rode up on horseback and leaped off with a hasty spring, throwing his bridle to the man who waited.

"Of course I am too late!" he exclaimed.

"Of course you are, by pretty near two hours. How did it happen, Mark?"

"Well — I can hardly tell how it happened," was the answer of Mark. "I had a patient to see in the country — more than one, in fact — and I thought I could do it all first and be back in time. But I suppose I must have stayed later than I purposed, for before I was ready to return I found it was half-past eleven, and the funeral no doubt over. And then I did not hurry myself."

They were walking across the hall to the dining-room as he said this. Caroline was seated at the table, her work-box before her, doing some embroidery. She flung the work down, rose, and confronted her husband.

"Mark, why did you do this? You went into the country to avoid the funeral!"

"I — I did what?" exclaimed Mark. "Nonsense, Carrie! Why should I wish to avoid the funeral? I have attended plenty of funerals in my time."

Oswald turned quickly and looked at Mark. It was not the accusation of Mrs. Cray that had aroused his attention, *that* went for nothing; but something peculiar in Mark's tone

as he answered it. To Oswald's ears it spoke of evasion. He could not see his face. It was bent, and he was slapping his dusty boots with his riding whip.

"But why did you go into the country?" pursued Caroline. "It was half-past ten when you were here, and I warned you then it was getting time to dress. When I saw your horse brought to the door and you gallop off on him, I could not believe my eyes."

"Well, I mistook the time, that's the fact. I am very sorry for it, but it can't be helped now. Of course I should like to have attended and paid her my last respects, poor lady. Not but that I dare say there were enough without me. I was not missed."

"But you were missed," said Oswald, "and waited for too. It threw us pretty nearly half-an-hour behindhand. I should not like to keep a funeral waiting myself, Mark."

"Who was there?" asked Mark.

"The two relatives of Lady Oswald, Sir Philip and his son, Dr. Davenal and myself."

"Davenal was there, then. But of course he would be. Then he served to do duty for me and himself. And so Sir Philip came!"

"I should be surprised had he not come."

"Should you! He is a cranky sort of gentleman: an Oswald all over. You are another of them, Oswald. I wonder if you'll get cranky in your old age."

"Don't listen to him, Oswald," interposed Mrs. Cray. "He seems 'cranky' himself this morning."

Mark laughed good-humouredly, and tossed a late China rose to Caroline which he had brought home in his button-hole. "Did you hear the will read, Oswald?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Short and sweet!" cried Mark, alluding to the mono-

syllable, which it must be confessed was given in a curt, displeased tone, as if its speaker were himself displeased. "I think it is you who are cranky, Oswald."

Oswald smiled. "A thought was causing me vexation, Mark."

"Vexation at me?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, and who comes in for the money? The Stephensons?"

"No. The Stephensons come in for a very poor portion. It is left to Dr. Davenal."

"To Dr. Davenal!" echoed Mark in his astonishment. "No!"

"The bulk of the money is bequeathed to him. All of it, in fact, with the exception of a few trifling legacies. The Stephensons have fifty pounds each and the furniture."

Caroline had dropped her embroidery again and was gazing at Oswald, apparently unable to take in the news. "Are you telling us this for a joke?" she asked.

"The money is left to Dr. Davenal, Mrs. Cray," repeated Oswald, and certainly there was no sound of joking in his tone. "It surprised us all."

"What a lucky man!" exclaimed Mark. "I wonder if he had any prevision of this yesterday? We were speaking of money, he and I. It was about that field behind the doctor's stables, the one he has so long wanted to buy. The owner's dead, and it is for sale at last. I observed to the doctor that I supposed he'd secure it at once, but he said he should not buy it at all; he had had a heavy loss, and could not afford it——"

"It is not true, Mark!" interrupted his wife.

"It is true, Caroline. But don't you go and repeat it again. He said, moreover, he had great need himself of a

thousand or two, and did not know where to turn to for it. Mind you, I believe he was betrayed, as it were, out of the avowal, I had been saying so much about the field: for he brought himself suddenly up as though recollection had come to him, and said, 'Don't talk of this, Mark!'"

And Mark's long tongue *had* talked of it! Oswald Cray listened to its every word.

"If he could but have foreseen then that this money had dropped to him! And yet — I should think he must have known it from Lady Oswald; or partially known it. How much is it, Oswald?"

"Six or seven thousand pounds. It would have been a great deal more but for certain losses. Wedderburn said she was persuaded to embark money in some speculation; and it failed."

"How stupid of her!" exclaimed free Mark. "I wonder, now, whether the doctor did know of this! If he did he'd keep his own counsel. Did he appear surprised, Oswald?"

"He was not there. He left before the will was read, saying he had to attend a consultation."

"Well, so he had," said Mark; "I happen to know that much. It was for half-past twelve."

"So far, then, Dr. Davenal had spoken truth. A doubt had been crossing Oswald's mind, amidst many other curious doubts, whether Dr. Davenal had made the excuse to get away, and so avoid hearing the will read, and himself named chief legatee.

He remained some time with Mark and his wife. They asked him to stay for dinner, but he declined. He had ordered a chop to be ready at the "Apple Tree," and was going back to London early in the evening — by that seven o'clock train you have before heard of.

"Had you any particular motive for absenting yourself

from Lady Oswald's funeral?" he asked of Mark, as the latter accompanied him to the street-door on his departure.

"Not I," answered Mark, with the most apparent readiness. "It was very bungling of me to mistake the time. Not that I like attending funerals as a matter of taste: I don't know who does. Good afternoon, Oswald. You must give us a longer visit when you are down next."

He stood at the abbey-door, watching his brother wind round the branching rails, for Oswald was taking the station on his way to his inn. Very cleverly, in Mark's own opinion, had he parried the questions of his purposed absence. His absence *was* purposed. With that chloroform on his conscience he did not care to attend the funeral of Lady Oswald.

And the afternoon went on.

It was growing dusk, was turned half-past six, and Oswald Cray was beginning to think it time to make ready for his departure. He had not stirred from the chair where he eat his dinner, though the meal was over long ago; had not called for lights; had, in fact, waved John Hamos away when he would have appeared with them. His whole range of thought was absorbed by one topic — his doubts of Dr. Davenal.

Yes, it is of no use to deny it; it had come to that with Oswald Cray — doubts. Doubts he scarcely knew of what, or to what extent; he scarcely knew where these doubts or his own thoughts were carrying him. On the previous night he had for a few moments given the reins to imagination; had allowed himself to suppose, for argument's sake only, that Dr. Davenal had given that chloroform knowing or fancying it might prove fatal, and he had gone so far as to ask what, then, could be his motive. There was no motive; Oswald glanced on each side of him to every point, and could discover no motive, whatever, or appearance of motive. Therefore he had thrust the doubts from him, as wanting foundation.

But had the revelations of this day supplied the link that was wanting? Had they not supplied it? *The death of Lady Oswald brought a fortune to Dr. Davenal.*

Almost hating himself for pursuing these thoughts, or rather for the obligation to pursue them, for they would haunt him, and he could not help himself, Oswald Cray sat on in the fading light. He said to himself, how absurd, nay, how wicked it was of him, and yet he could not shake them off. The more he strove to do so, the more he brought reason to his aid, telling him that Dr. Davenal was a good and honourable and upright man, as he had always believed, the less would reason hold the mastery. Imagination was all too present in its most vivid colouring, and it was chaining him to its will.

What were the simple facts? asked reason. Dr. Davenal had caused Lady Oswald to inhale chloroform, having only some hours previously avowed to Oswald his belief that she was a most unfit subject for it, was one of those few to whom the drug proves fatal. It did prove fatal. There had next been some equivocation on the part of Mark, when questioned about it, and there had been the positive refusal of Dr. Davenal to afford any explanation. Next there had been the discovery of the day — that Dr. Davenal was the inheritor. Well, it might all be explained away, reason said; it was certainly not enough to attribute to Dr. Davenal the worst social crime contained in the Decalogue. But the more Oswald Cray dwelt on this view, or tried to dwell upon it, the more persistently rose up imagination, torturing and twisting facts, and bending them as it pleased.

There had been that hint of Neal's too! Oswald Cray honestly believed that Neal was one of those servants incapable of speaking ill for ill's sake; and he could not help wondering what he meant. Neal was not an ignorant man, likely to be deceived, to take up fancies: he was of superior

intelligence, quite an educated man for his class of life. If —

Oswald's thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of his landlord. "I don't want lights, John; I told you I did not. I shall be going directly."

"It is not lights, sir. Mr. Neal, Dr. Davenal's servant, is asking to see you."

"Neal! Let him come in."

Neal came forward into the dusky room. He was the bearer of a note from his master. Oswald had a light brought in then, and opened it. It was written in pencil.

"MY DEAR MR. OSWALD CRAY,

"I very much wish to see you if you can spare me an hour. I thought perhaps you would have dropped in this lonely day and taken a knife and fork with us. Will you come down this evening?

"Ever sincerely yours,

"RICHARD DAVENAL."

"Neal, will you tell Dr. Davenal — he is expecting me, I find?"

"I think so, sir. He said to me before dinner that he thought you might be coming in. When he found you did not, and they were sitting down to table, he wrote this in pencil, and bade me call one of the maids to wait, while I brought it up to you."

"Tell the doctor that I am quite unable to come down. I have to return to London by the seven o'clock train."

"Very well, sir."

Neal was leaving the room, but Mr. Oswald Cray stopped him. He had taken a sudden resolution, and he spoke on the spur of the moment, without reflection. The perplexity of his mind may be his excuse.

"Neal, have you any objection to tell me what you meant last night by hinting that Lady Oswald had not come fairly by her death?"

Neal paused. He was a man of caution; he liked to calculate his words and his ways before entering on them. Neal would certainly speak if he dared. He was in a very bitter mood, for the day's doings had not pleased him. The news had reached him that her ladyship's money had been all left to Dr. Davenal; that he, Neal, was not so much as named in the will. And Neal had looked forward as confidently as had the Reverend Mr. Stephenson to the hope of some little remembrance being left to him. In this terrible anger, it seemed to him that the one enemy to prevent it had been the great inheritor, Dr. Davenal.

"Sir, if I speak, would you give me your promise first, to hold what I say sacred to yourself; to let it go no further? I know, sir, it is not the place of a servant to ask this confidence of a gentleman, but I should be afraid to speak without it."

"I will give it you," said Mr. Oswald Cray. "You may rely upon me."

And Neal knew that if there was one man more than another on the face of the earth who would never forfeit his word, upon whom implicit trust might be placed, it was Oswald Cray. Neal set himself to his task. First of all opening the door to make sure they were entirely alone, he dropped his voice to a safe whisper, and described what he had seen and heard on the Sunday night. It was certainly a startling narration, and as Oswald Cray listened to it in that darkened room, — for the one candle, now placed on a side-table behind, only served to throw out the shadows, — listened to the hushed tones, the unexplainable words, a curious feeling of dread began to creep over him. Neal, you may be very sure, did not disclose anything that could bear against him-

self; he contrived to come out well in it. He was standing outside for a moment before going to bed, hoping the air would remove the sad headache which had suddenly seized him upon hearing of the death of his late lady, when he saw the man come in in the extraordinary manner he had just described. Believing him to be nothing less than a house-breaker (and Watton, who had seen the man from her room up-stairs, had come to the same conclusion), or an evil character of some sort, getting in plausibly on false pretences to work harm to Dr. Davenal, he had gone to the window to look in out of anxiety for his master's safety, and there had heard what he had stated, for the window was thrown open. He could not see the visitor, who was seated in the shade: he only heard sufficient to tell him that the business he had come on was Lady Oswald's death; and he heard Dr. Davenal acknowledge that it was murder, and that it must be hushed up at any price, even if it cost him his fortune. He, Neal, described the utterly prostrate condition of his master that night; both before and after the interview with the visitor, he was like one who has some dreadful secret upon the mind, some heavy guilt; Neal had thought so, before ever the man, whoever he might have been, entered the house.

Will it be forgiven to Oswald Cray if in that brief confused moment he believed the worst — believed all that Neal said to him? His mind was in a chaos of perplexity, almost, it may be said, of terror. Nothing was clear. He could not analyse, he could not reason: Neal's words, and the doings of the night which the man was describing, seemed to dance before his mind in confused forms, ever changing, as do the bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope. Neal continued to speak, but he did not hear him distinctly now; the words reached his senses certainly, but more as if he were in a mazy dream. He heard the man reiterate that wherever it was his master had

gone to, that night, remaining away until the Wednesday, it was connected with the death of Lady Oswald; he heard him say that, whatever the mystery and the guilt, Miss Sara Davenal had been made the confidant of it by her father, he, Neal, supposed from some imperative motive which he did not pretend to understand. Oswald heard like one in a dream, the words partially glancing off his mind even as they were spoken, only to be recalled afterwards with redoubled force.

In the midst of it he suddenly looked at his watch, suspecting — as he found — that he had barely time to catch the train.

And he went out in a sort of blind confusion, his brain echoing the words of Dr. Davenal, only too accurately remembered and repeated by Neal. "Murder? Yes, the world would look upon it as such. — I felt certain that Lady Oswald was one to whom chloroform, if administered, would prove fatal."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Dr. Davenal's "Folly."

It was startling news to go forth to Hallingham — one of the nine days' wonders read of in social history. Lady Oswald had bequeathed her fortune to her physician, Dr. Davenal! Such things had been known before in the world's experiences, but Hallingham made as much of the fact as if that were the first time it had ever been enacted.

Upon none did the news fall with more complete astonishment than upon the doctor himself. Lady Oswald had more than once in the past few months mysteriously hinted to him that he would be rewarded some time for his care and attention to her; and it must be supposed that she had these hints in her mind when she said to Mr. Oswald Cray that "he" (the

named inheritor of her money) knew that he would be rewarded. Upon Dr. Davenal the hints had never made any impression. Of a nature the very reverse of covetous, simple-minded, single-hearted, it never so much as crossed his imagination that she would be leaving her money to *him*. He would have been the first to repudiate it; to point out to her the injustice of the act.

It is surely not necessary to premise that you, my intelligent and enlightened readers, cannot have fallen into the mistake made by Neal, or drawn that respected domestic's very absurd, though perhaps to a fanciful and prejudiced mind not unnatural, deduction, that the night-visit to Dr. Davenal had reference to Lady Oswald's death. Being in the secret of who really did administer that fatal dose of chloroform to Lady Oswald, you will not connect it with Dr. Davenal's trouble. A heavy secret, involving disgrace, much misery, perhaps ruin, had indeed fallen that night on Dr. Davenal, but it was entirely unconnected with the death of Lady Oswald. The words which Neal had heard — and he heard them correctly — would have borne to his mind a very different interpretation had he been enabled to hear the *whole* — what had preceded them and what followed them. But he did not.

Yes, this unhappy secret, this great misfortune, had nothing to do with Lady Oswald. Far from Dr. Davenal's having caused her to inhale an extra dose of chloroform as an experiment, on the strength that it might prove fatal, and so enable him to drop at once into that very desirable legacy named in her will, and which supposition, I am sure you will agree with me in thinking, belongs rather to the world of idealic wonders than of real life, the doctor had not the faintest suspicion that he should inherit a shilling. When

the news was conveyed to him he could not believe it to be true, — did not believe it for some little time.

It was Mr. Wedderburn who carried it to him. When the lawyer's business was over at Lady Oswald's, he proceeded to Dr. Davenal's and found him just come home from the consultation, to attend which he had hurried away before the reading of the will. Mr. Wedderburn told him the news.

"Left to me!" exclaimed the doctor. "Her money left to me! Nonsense!"

"It is indeed," affirmed Mr. Wedderburn. "After the legacies are paid you take everything — you are residuary legatee."

"You are joking," said the doctor. "What have I to do with the money? I have no right to it."

With some difficulty Dr. Davenal was convinced that he and he alone was named the inheritor. It did not give him pleasure. Quite the contrary; he saw in it only a good deal of trouble and law business, which he much disliked at all times to engage in.

Richard Davenal was one of those thoroughly conscientious men — and there are a few such in the world — who could not be content to enjoy money to which another has more right. It was a creed of his — it is not altogether an obsolete one — that money so enjoyed could not bring pleasure in the spending, or good in the end. Lady Oswald had legitimate relations, who had looked for the money, who needed the money, needed it with a far deeper need than Dr. Davenal, and who possessed a claim to it, so far as relationship could give it them. Even as the conviction slowly arose to him that the news was true that he had been made the inheritor, so there arose another conviction, or rather a resolution, with it, — that he would never accept the money, that it should go over to its legitimate owners, no matter what

trouble it involved. A resolution from which he never swerved.

Never. Not even in the moment when a tempter's voice arose within him, whispering how well this legacy would serve to replace that great sum, the savings of years, which he had been obliged to part with only that very week. Partly to satisfy a debt of which until then he had known nothing, had he parted with it; partly as hush-money, to keep down that terrible secret whispered to him on the Sunday night. The thought certainly did arise — that it almost seemed as if this money had been sent to him to replace it; but he did not allow it to obtain weight. It would have been simply impossible for Dr. Davenal to act against his conscience.

"I shall refuse the legacy," he remarked to Mr. Wedderburn. "I have no right to it."

"What did you say?" asked the lawyer, believing he did not properly catch the words.

"I shall not accept this money. It is none of mine. It ought to be none of mine. It must go to Lady Oswald's relatives."

"But it is yours, Dr. Davenal. It is bequeathed to you in the will."

"I don't care for the will. I should not care for ten wills, if I had no right to the money they bequeathed me. I have no right to this, and I will not touch a farthing of it."

Mr. Wedderburn's surprise could only expend itself in one long stare. In all his lawyerly experience he had never come across an announcement so savouring of chivalry. The legatees he had had the pleasure of doing business with were only too eager to grasp their good fortune, and if any little inconvenient pricks of conscience were so ill-mannered as to arise, they were speedily despatched back again by the very legal thought — If I do take it I but obey the will.

"There never was such a thing heard of, as the refusing of a fortune legally bequeathed," cried the lawyer.

"I daresay there has been, many a time. If not, this will be a precedent."

"You'll be so laughed at," persisted Mr. Wedderburn. "You'll be set down — I'm afraid people will be for setting you down as a lunatic."

"Let them," said the doctor. "They shan't confine me as one without my own certificate. Mr. Wedderburn," he continued in a graver tone, "I am serious in this refusal. I feel that I have no right whatever to this money of Lady Oswald's. She has paid me liberally for my services —"

"If you only knew how many thousands inherit money daily who have no right to it," interrupted Mr. Wedderburn.

"Doubtless they do. I was going to observe that it is not so much my having no right to it, that would cause me to decline, as the fact that others exist who have a right. I —"

"But the will gives you a right," interposed the lawyer, unable to get over his surprise.

"A legal right, I am aware it does. But not a just one. No, I will not accept this legacy."

"What will you do about it, then?"

The doctor was silent for a minute. "I should wish the money to be appropriated just as though there had been no Dr. Davenal in existence. You say this will was made but about six months ago. It must have superseded another will, I presume?"

"It may be said that it superseded several," was the reply. "Lady Oswald was constantly making wills. She had made some half-dozen before this last one."

"And each one disposing of her property differently?" quickly asked the doctor.

"Yes, or nearly so. Twice she bequeathed it to her

nephews, the Stephensons. Once it was left to Mr. Oswald Cray; once to charities; once to Sir Philip Oswald. She has been exceedingly capricious."

"All the more reason why I should not take it now," warmly cried Dr. Davenal. "She must have left it to me in a moment of caprice; and had she lived a few months longer this will would have been revoked as the rest have been. Mr. Wedderburn, were I capable of acting upon it, of taking the money, I should lose all self-respect for ever. I could not, as a responsible being, responsible to One who sees and judges all I do, be guilty of so crying an injustice."

Mr. Wedderburn suppressed a shrug of the shoulders. He could only look at these affairs with a lawyer's eye and a lawyer's reasoning. Dr. Davenal resumed.

"What was the tenor of the will which this last one superseded? Do you recollect?"

"Perfectly. We hold the draft of it still. It was as nearly as possible a counterpart of the present one, excepting as relates to your share in this and that of the brothers Stephenson. In that last will they took your place. The furniture was bequeathed to them, as in this, and also the bulk of the property."

"My name not being mentioned in it?"

"Yes, it was. The diamond ring bequeathed to you now was bequeathed then. Nothing more to you."

"Then that's all right. Now, Mr. Wedderburn, listen to me. That diamond ring I will accept with pleasure, as a reminiscence of my poor friend and patient; but I will accept nothing else. Will you be so kind as to destroy this last will, and let the other be acted upon? I am scaring you, I see. If that cannot legally be done, I must let the money come to me, but only in transit for the rightful owners, thr Reverend Mr. Stephenson and his brother, and I'll make them a present of

it. You will manage this for me. Being at home in law details, you know of course what may and what may not be done. All I beg of you is to effect this, carrying it out in the simplest manner, and in the quickest possible time."

Mr. Wedderburn drew a long face. He had no more cause to wish the money to go to Dr. Davenal than to the clergyman and his brother, but it was altogether so unusual a mode of proceeding, would be so very unprofessional a transaction, that he regarded it as an innovation hardly to be tolerated, a sort of scandal on all recognised notions in the legal world, of which Mr. Wedderburn himself was little better than a machine.

"I cannot undertake it without your giving me instructions in writing, Dr. Davenal," he said glumpily. "I'd not stir a peg in it without."

"You shall have them in full."

"Well, sir, you know best, but the time may come when your children will not thank you for this. It is folly, Dr. Davenal, and nothing less."

"I hope my children will never question any act of mine. I am doing this for the best."

Nevertheless, as Dr. Davenal spoke, there was some pain in his tone. The lawyer detected it, and thought he was coming round. He would not speak immediately, but let the feeling work its way.

"It is a large sum to relinquish," the lawyer presently said: "to throw out of one's hand as if it were so much worthless sand."

"What is the sum? — what has she left?" asked Dr. Davenal, the remark reminding him that he was as yet in ignorance.

"I expect, when all the legacies and other expenses are paid, there will be a little over six thousand pounds. There

ought to have been double. Lady Oswald lost a large sum a few years ago, quite as much as that. She put it into some prosperous-looking bubble, and it burst. Women should never dabble in business. They are safe to get their fingers burnt."

"Men have burnt theirs sometimes," was the answer of Dr. Davenal, spoken significantly. "Six thousand pounds! I should have thought her worth much more. Well, Mr. Wedderburn, you will carry out my instructions."

"Of course, if you order me. Will you be so kind as to write those instructions to me at your convenience, posting them from this town to my house. I am going back home at once."

"Won't you see Mr. Stephenson and his brother first, and impart to them the fact that I shall not take the money?"

"No," said the lawyer, "I want to go home by the next train. I wish, Dr. Davenal, you would allow me to give you just one word of advice."

"You can give it me," said Dr. Davenal. "I don't promise to take it."

"It might be the better for you if you would," was the reply. "My advice is, say nothing to the Stephensons, or to any one else, to-day. This is a very strange resolution that you have expressed, and I beg you to sleep upon it. A night's rest may serve to change your mind."

The lawyer departed. It was close upon the hour for Dr. Davenal to receive his indoor patients, and he could not go out then. He went to look for his daughter, and found her in the garden parlour with her aunt. It was not often that Miss Bettina troubled that room — she had been wont to tell Sara and Caroline that its litter set her teeth on edge.

They began to talk to him of the funeral. It was natural

they should do so. In a country place these somewhat unusual occurrences of every-day life are made much of. Miss Bettina was curious.

"Were the people from Thorndyke there?" she asked.

"Sir Philip and his eldest son."

"And Oswald Cray?"

"Of course. He came down on purpose."

"My goodness! And so they met! How did they behave, Richard?"

"Just as the rest of us behaved. Did you suppose they'd start a quarrel?"

"I was sure of it. I knew they would never meet without starting one. Nothing less could come of Oswald Cray's proud spirit and the manner they have treated him."

"At sea as usual, Bettina. Do you think they'd quarrel *there*?—on that solemn occasion? Oswald Cray and Sir Philip are proud enough, both of them; but they are *gentlemen*—you forget that, Bettina. I think Oswald Cray is about the least likely man to quarrel that I know, whether with Sir Philip or with any body else. Your proud man washes his hands of people whom he despises; but he does not quarrel with them."

How singularly true were the words in regard to Oswald Cray! It was as though Dr. Davenal had worn in that moment the gift of prevision; "Your proud man washes his hands of people whom he despises."

"And how is her money left?" continued Miss Bettina. "To the Stephensons?"

"No, she has not made a just will. It is left to —— to a stranger. A stranger in blood."

"Indeed! To whom? I hope *you* have been remembered with some little token, Richard?"

"To be sure I have been. You know those two splendid

diamond rings of hers: I have one, Oswald Cray the other. And that's all he has got, by the way, except a silver coffee-pot, or so. Sara, come with me into the garden, I wish to have a little chat with you."

"You have not told me who the stranger is," shrieked out Miss Bettina.

"I'll tell you by-and-by," called back the doctor.

"I did not think it likely she would leave anything to Oswald Cray, papa," Sara remarked, as they paced the garden path.

"I think I should, had I been in her place. A matter of five hundred pounds, or so, would have helped him on wonderfully. However, there was no obligation, and it is a question whether Oswald would have accepted it."

"You said it was not a just will, papa?"

"I could have gone further than that, Sara, and stigmatised it as a very unjust one. Those poor Stephensons, who have been expecting this money — who had a right to expect it — are cut off with a paltry fifty pounds each and the furniture."

"Oh, papa! And are they not very poor?"

"So poor, that I believe honestly they have not always bread to eat; that is, what people, born as they were, designate as bread; proper food. They carry the signs of it in their countenances."

"And for Lady Oswald to have left her money away from them! To whom has she left it?"

"To one who has no right to it, who never expected it."

"I suppose you mean Sir Philip?"

"No, it is not left to him. But now, give me your opinion, Sara. Let us for argument's sake put ourselves in the position of this fortunate legatee. Suppose — suppose, my dear, it were left to *you*: this money to which you have no claim, no

right — to which others have a claim, how should you feel?"

"I should feel uncomfortable," replied Sara. "I should feel that I was enriched at the expense of the Stephensons; I am sure that I should feel almost as though I had committed a fraud. Papa," she added more eagerly, the idea occurring to her, "I should like to give the money back to them."

"That is the very argument I have been using myself. Wedderburn, Lady Oswald's lawyer, has been here, talking of the matter, and I told him that were I the man to whom it was left, I should give it back, every shilling of it, to the channel where it ought at once to have gone — the brothers Stephenson. Wedderburn did not agree with me: he brought forward the argument that the man's children might reproach him afterwards. What do you think?"

"I think, papa, that were I the man you speak of, I should act upon my own judgment, and give it back without reference to the opinion of my children."

"That is precisely what he has resolved to do. Sara, the money is left to me."

Sara Davenal, taken completely by surprise, halted in her walk and looked at the doctor, not knowing how to believe him.

"It is true, Sara. I find I am the favoured legatee of Lady Oswald: knowing at the same time that I have no more right to be so than have those espalier rose-trees at your side. I have resolved to refuse the money; to repudiate the will altogether, so far as my share in it goes; and to suffer a previous will to be acted upon, which gives the money to the Stephensons. I trust my children will not hereafter turn round and reproach me."

"Oh, papa!"

She spoke the words now almost reproachfully, in reproach that he could ever think it.

"Yes, I shall do it, Sara. And yet," he added, his voice insensibly sinking to a whisper, "I have heavy need for money just now; and the help these thousands would be to me no one but myself knows."

Sara was silent. A shiver passed over her face at the allusion. She did not dare reply to it. The subject was too painful; and, besides, she was kept partially in the dark.

"But I cannot tamper with my conscience," resumed Dr. Davenal. "Were I to take this money, it would only lie like a weight upon it for my whole future life. I believe — and, Sara, I wish you to believe it and treasure it as an assured truth — that money appropriated by ourselves, which in point of right, of justice, belongs to others, *never* comes home to us with a blessing. However safely the law may give it us and the world deem our claim to it legitimate, if we deprive others of it, whose it is by every moral and — may I say it? — divine right, that money will not bless us or our children. Sara, I speak this from the experience of an observant life."

"I am sure you are right papa," she murmured. "Do not keep this money."

"I shall not. But, Sara," — and Dr. Davenal stopped in his walk, and his voice grew solemn in its tone as he laid his hand upon her — "things have changed with me. I cannot now foresee the future. I thought I was laying up a competency for my children; not a great one, it is true, but one that would have kept them above the extreme frowns of the world. This I have had to fling away — my hard-earned savings. It may be, that I shall now have to leave you, my cherished daughter, to the world's mercy; perhaps — I know not — compelled to work for your living in it. Should this

come to pass, you will not cast back a reflection on your dead father, and reproach him for the rejection of these thousands."

The tears were streaming down her cheeks. Her pleading hand, her loving look, was his first answer. "You could not keep the money, papa. It would not be right in God's sight. Do not hesitate."

"I have not hesitated, Sara. My mind has been made up from the first. But I preferred to speak to you."

Neal came forward to summon Dr. Davenal. His patients were waiting for him. Sara turned to rejoin her aunt.

"You can tell her about this legacy to me, Sara; it will be the talk of the town before the day's out. And explain to her why I decline it."

The afternoon drew to its close. Dr. Davenal, engaged with a succession of patients, scarcely noticed its elapse. A wish was running through his mind to see Mr. Oswald Cray, and he hoped he would be calling. When dinner-time came and he had not come, that note, previously mentioned, was pencilled, and Neal despatched with it.

The man brought the message back in due course: "Mr Oswald Cray was unable to call upon the doctor, as he was departing for London." Dr. Davenal was disappointed; he had wished to explain to Oswald Cray his intentions respecting the money; he considered it due to him, Oswald, to do so.

How is it that there are times when an idea, without any apparent cause to lead to it, any reason to justify it, takes sudden possession of the mind? Even as Neal spoke, such an idea seated itself in Dr. Davenal's. He fancied that Oswald Cray was in some way not pleased at the disposition of Lady Oswald's property, as regarded Dr. Davenal; was in a degree, more or less, resenting it. It only made the doctor doubly desirous of seeing him.

But there was no chance of it at present, Oswald Cray having left Hallingham. Dr. Davenal put on his hat and went out to take a walk as far as Lady Oswald's.

He found the Rev. Mr. Stephenson alone. His brother had departed. The clergyman received him somewhat awkwardly. He had been brooding over his disappointment all by himself; had been thinking what a crying wrong it was that the money should be left to the flourishing and wealthy physician, Dr. Davenal, who put as many guineas into his pocket daily, as would keep him and his family in their humble way for months. He was casting his anxious thoughts to the future, wondering how his children were to be educated, foreseeing nothing but embarrassment and struggle to the very end of his life; and I am not sure that his heart at that moment towards that one man, was not full of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Ministers of the gospel are but human, swayed at times by evil passions, just as we are.

But, being in this frame of mind, it a little confused the reverend gentleman to see the object of his envy standing before him. Dr. Davenal drew forward a seat.

"I daresay, Mr. Stephenson, if the truth were known, you were at this very moment bestowing upon me plenty of hard names."

It was so exceedingly like what Mr. Stephenson had been doing, that all the reply he could make was a confused stammer. Dr. Davenal, who, for the interview, appeared to have put away from the surface his hidden care, resumed in a frank, free tone —

"I have no right to the money, have I? It ought to have gone to you and your brother?"

"Well, sir — perhaps you had been led to expect it by Lady Oswald," was the clergyman's answer. Of a timid and

refined nature, he could not, to Dr. Davenal's face, express his sense of the wrong. With Dr. Davenal before him, cordial and open, he began to think the wrong less. That is, that it was not so much the doctor's fault, as he had been angrily deeming.

"No, she never led me to expect anything of the sort; and you cannot be more surprised than I am at its being left to me," said the doctor. "When Mr. Wedderburn came to me with the news, I could not believe him. However, it appears to be the fact."

"Yes," meekly rejoined the clergyman; "it is."

"And I have now come to inform you, that I shall not take the money, Mr. Stephenson. Not a stiver of it. The will, so far as it concerns me, may be regarded as a dead letter, for all practical use. I have desired Mr. Wedderburn to transfer the money to you and your brother; and if this may not legally be, if I must, despite myself, accept the money, I only take it to restore it to you. You will not be too proud to accept it from me?"

Was he listening to fact? -- or was he in a dream? The words, to the minister's ear, did not savour of reality. His pale face grew moist with emotion, his trembling hands entwined their thin fingers together. He did not dare to ask, Was it real? lest the answer should dissolve the spell, and prove it but illusion.

"I could not accept of this great sum to the prejudice of others who have a right to it," resumed Dr. Davenal. "I should fear its proving something like ill-gotten gains, that bring evil with them, instead of good. The money shall be yours and your brother's, Mr. Stephenson, just as surely as though it had been left to you by Lady Oswald. The diamond ring I shall keep and value, but not a shilling of the money. I thought I would come up and tell you this."

The tears were welling into that poor gentleman's eyes, as he rose and clasped the hand of Dr. Davenal. "If you could see what I have suffered; if you could only imagine the struggle life has been to me, you would know what I feel at this moment. Heaven send its blessings on your generosity!"

The doctor quitted him. He had found a heavy heart, he left a glad one. He quitted him and went forth into the stillness of the autumn night.

He glanced towards the bright stars as he walked along, thinking of the future. And a prayer went up from his heart to the throne of heaven — that, if it was God's will, his children might not feel hereafter the sacrifice he had made — that God would bless them and be merciful to them when he should be gone. The last few days had been sufficient to teach Dr. Davenal, had he never known it before, in how great need the apparently safest amongst us stand of this ever-loving mercy.

CHAPTER XXV.

Company for Mr. Oswald Cray.

For some days subsequent to the interview with Neal, and that valuable servant's startling communication, Mr. Oswald Cray remained in what may be called a sea of confusion. The unhappy circumstances attendant on Lady Oswald's death never left his mind, the strange suspicions first arising naturally, as they did arise, and then augmented by Neal's disclosure, seemed to be ever waging hot war within him, for they were entirely antagonistic to sober reason, to his life-long experience of Dr. Davenal.

It cannot be denied that Oswald Cray, calm of temperament, though he was, sound of judgment, did fall into the snare that the web of events had woven around him; and,

in the midnight watches, when things wear to our senses a weird, ghostlike hue, the disagreeable word, murder, suggested itself to him oftener than he would have cared to confess in broad, matter-of-fact daylight. But as the days went on, his senses came to him. Reason re-asserted her empire, and he flung the dark doubt from him, as unworthy of himself and the present enlightened age. It was impossible to connect such a crime with Dr. Davenal.

But still, though he shook off the worst view, he could not shake off the circumstances and their suspicion. Perhaps it was next to impossible, knowing what he did know of the doctor's sentiments as to chloroform, hearing as he had heard, Neal's account of the words spoken at the midnight interview, that he should shake them off. They turned and twisted themselves about in his mind in spite of his will; he would have given much to get rid of them, but he could not. Now taking one phase, now another, now looking dark, now light, there they were, like so many phantoms, ever springing up from different corners of his mind, and putting legitimate thoughts out of it. Up and in bed, at work or at rest, were those conflicting arguments ever dancing attendance on him, until, from sheer perplexity, his brain would seem to lose its subtle powers, and grow dull from very weariness. But the worst aspect of the affair gradually lost its impression, and reason drove away the high colours of imagination.

The conclusion to which he at length came, and in which he finally settled down, was that Dr. Davenal had been in a partial degree guilty. He *could not* think that he had given that chloroform to Lady Oswald with the deliberate view of taking her life, as some of our worst criminals have taken lives; but he did believe there was some hidden culpability attached to it. Could it have been given in forgetfulness? — or by way of experiment? — or carelessly? Oswald Cray

asked himself those questions ten times in a day. No, no, reason answered; Dr. Davenal was not a man to forget, or to experimentalise, or to do things carelessly. And then, with the answer, rose the one dark, awful doubt again, tormenting him not less with its shadows than with its preposterous absurdity.

What clung to his mind more than all the rest was, that he could see no solution, or chance of solution to the question of why chloroform was administered, why even it was taken to the house. Had Dr. Davenal frankly answered him when questioned, "I thought, in spite of my conversation with you, that chloroform might be ventured upon with safety, that it would ease her sufferings, and was absolutely necessary to calm her state of excitement," why he could have had no more to say, however lamenting the fatal effects. But Dr. Davenal had answered nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he had been mysterious over it, and at length flatly refused to satisfy him at all. So far as Oswald Cray could see, there was no other solution, then or ever, that could be arrived at, save that the chloroform had been administered wilfully and deliberately. If so, then with what view had Dr. Davenal —

At this point Oswald Cray always pulled his thoughts up, or strove to do so, and plunged desperately into another phase of the affair, as if he would run away from dangerous ground. Once he caught himself wondering whether, if the doctor had been deliberately guilty, it lay in his duty — his, Oswald Cray's — to bring him to account for it. No living being save himself, so far as he trusted, had been cognisant of Dr. Davenal's strong opinion of chloroform as applied to Lady Oswald. Ought he, then, not only in the obligation which lies upon all honest men to bring crime to light, but

as a connection of Lady Oswald's, ought he to be the Nemesis, and denounce —

With a quicker beating of the heart, with a burning flush upon his brow, Oswald Cray started from the train of thought. Into what strange gulf was it carrying him? Ah, not though it had been his fate to see the crime committed, and to know that it was a crime, would *he* be the one to bring it home to Richard Davenal? The man whom he had so respected; the father of her who possessed his best love, and who would possess it, in spite of his efforts to withdraw it, for all time? No; not against *him* could his hand be raised in judgment.

In spite of his efforts to withdraw his love? Had it come to that with Oswald Cray? Indeed it had. He could not fathom the affair, it remained to him utterly incomprehensible, but that Dr. Davenal was in some way or other compromised by it, terribly compromised, seemed as plain as the sun at noonday. And Mr. Oswald Cray, in his haughty spirit, his besetting pride, decided that he could no longer be on terms of friendship with him, and that Sara Davenal must be no wife of his.

What it cost him to come to this resolution of casting her adrift, none save Heaven knew. The struggle remained on his memory for years afterwards as the sorest pain life had ever brought him. It was the bitter turning-point which too many of us have to arrive at, and pass; the dividing link which dashes away the sunny meads, the flowery paths of life's young romance, and sends us stumbling and shivering down the stony road of reality. None knew, none ever would know, what that struggle was to Oswald Cray.

Not a struggle as to the course he should pursue — the breaking off intimacy with her: never for a single moment did he hesitate in that. The struggle lay with his feelings, with his own heart, where she was entwined with its every

fibre, part and parcel of its very self. He strove to put her out thence, and she would not be put out. There she remained, and he was conscious that there she would remain for many a dreary year to come.

But for his overweening pride, how different things might have been! He was too just a man to include Sara in the doctor's — dare he say it? — crime. Although Neal had said that Miss Sara Davenal had been made cognisant of it, Oswald did not visit upon her one iota of blame. She was no more responsible for the doctor's acts than he was, neither could she help them. No, he did not cast a shadow of reproach upon her; she had done nothing to forfeit his love; but she was her father's daughter, and therefore no fit wife for him. One whose pride was less in the ascendant than Mr. Oswald Cray's, whose self-esteem was less sensitively fastidious, might have acted upon this consciousness of her immunity from blame, and set himself to see whether there was not a way out of the dilemma rather than have given her up, off-hand, at the very first onset. He might have gone in his candour to Dr. Davenal and said, "I love your daughter; I had wished to make her my wife; tell me confidentially, is there a reason why I, an honourable man, should not?" Not so Mr. Oswald Cray and his haughty pride. Without a single moment of hesitation he shook himself free from all future contact with the daughter of Dr. Davenal, just as he was trying to shake her from his heart. Never more, never more, might he look forward to the life of happiness he had been wont to picture.

It was a cruel struggle, cruel to him; and the red flush of shame mantled in his brow as he thought of the binding words he had spoken to her, and the dishonour that must accrue to him in breaking them. There was not a man on

the face of the earth whose sense of honour was more keen than Oswald Cray's, who was less capable of wilfully doing aught to tarnish it; and yet that tarnishing was thrust upon him. Any way, it seemed that a great stain must fall upon it. To take one to be his wife, whose father was a suspected man, would be a blot indeed; and to slip through the words he had spoken, never more to take notice of her or them, was scarcely less so. He felt it keenly; he, the man of unblemished conduct, and, it may be said, of unblemished heart.

But still he did not for a moment hesitate. Great as the pain was to himself, little as she, in her innocence, deserved that the slight should be inflicted on her, he never wavered in that which he knew must be. The only question that arose to him was, how it should be best done. Should he speak to her? — or should he gradually drop all intimacy and let the fact become known to her in that way? Which would be the kinder course? That the separation would be productive of the utmost pain to her as to him, that she loved him with all the fervour of a first and pure attachment, he knew; and he felt for her to his very heart's core. He hated himself for having to inflict this pain, and he heartily wished, as things had turned out, that he had never yielded to the pleasure of becoming intimate at Dr. Davenal's. Well, which should be his course? Oswald Cray sat over his fire one cold evening after business was over, and deliberated upon it. Some weeks had gone on then. He leaned his elbow on the arm of his chair, and bent his cheek on his hand, and gazed abstractedly on the blaze. He shrank from the very idea of speaking to her. No formal engagement existed between them: it had been implied more than spoken; and he would be scarcely justified in saying to her, "I cannot marry you now," considering that he had never in so many

words asked her to marry him at all. She might regard it as a gratuitous insult.

But, putting that aside, he did not see his way clear to speak to her. What reason could he give for his withdrawal? He could not set it down to his own caprice; and he could not — no, he *could not* — put forth to her the plea of her father's misdoing. He began to think it might be better to maintain silence, and so let the past and its words die away. If —

He was aroused from his train of thought by the entrance of a woman — a woman in a black bonnet and sleeves turned up to the elbow, with a rather crusty expression of face. This was Mrs. Benn, the housekeeper, cleaner, cook of the house. It did not lie in Mrs. Benn's province to wait on Mr. Oswald Cray, or she would probably have attired herself more in accordance with her duty. It lay in her husband's, and he had been sent out this evening by Mr. Oswald Cray on business connected with the firm. On cleaning days — and they occurred twice in the week — Mrs. Benn was wont to descend in the morning in the black bonnet, and keep it on until she went to bed. It was not worn as bonnets are worn usually; the crown behind and the brim before; but was perched right on the top of her head, brim downwards: and Mrs. Benn was under a firm persuasion that this kept her hair and her cap free from the dust she was wont to raise in sweeping. She was about forty, but looked fifty, and her face had got a patch of black-lead upon it, and a nail had torn a rent in her check apron.

"Wouldn't you like the things taken away, sir?" she asked in a tone as crusty as her look. "I am waiting to wash 'em up."

This recalled Oswald Cray's notice to the fact that the remains of his dinner were yet upon the table. He believed he had rung for them to be taken away when he turned to the

fire; and there he had sat with his back to them since, never noticing that nobody had come to do it. It was now a little past seven, and Mrs. Benn had grown angry and indignant at the waiting.

"I declare I thought they had gone away," he said. "I suppose the bell did not ring. I am sure I touched it."

"No bell have rung at all," returned Mrs. Benn resentfully. "I stood down there with my hands afore me till the clock had gone seven, and then I thought I'd come up and see what was keeping 'em. You haven't eat much this evening, sir," she added, looking at the dish of steak and the potatoes. "I don't think you have eat much lately. Don't you feel well?"

"Well! I am very well," he replied carelessly, rising from his chair and stretching himself. "Is Benn not back yet?"

"No, he is not back," she returned, her tone becoming rather an explosive one, boding no good for the absent Mr. Benn. "He don't seem to hurry himself, *he* don't, though he knows if he didn't get back I should have to come up here: and very fit I be on my cleaning days to appear before a gentleman."

"Is it necessary to clean in a bonnet?" asked Oswald quietly.

"It's necessary to clean in something, sir, to protect one's head from the fluff and stuff that collects. One would wonder where it comes from, all in a week. I used to tie a apron over my cap, but it was always coming off, or else blowing its corners into the way of one's eyes."

Oswald laughed. He remembered the apron era, and the guy Mrs. Benn looked. For twelve years had she and her husband been the servants of that house. Formerly Mr. Bracknell, an old bachelor, had lived in it, and Benn and his wife waited on him, as they now did on Mr. Oswald Cray.

"Would you like tea this evening, sir?" she inquired. For sometimes Oswald took tea and sometimes he did not.

"Yes; if you bring it up directly. I am going out."

She went away with her tray of things. Down the first flight of stairs, past the offices, and down again to the kitchen. The ground floor of this house in Parliament Street was occupied by the offices of the firm, and partially so the floors above. Oswald Cray had two or three rooms for his own use; his sitting-room, not a very large one, being on the first floor.

His train of thought had been broken by the woman, and he did not recall it. He stepped into an adjoining apartment, lighted a shaded lamp, sat down, and began examining a drawing of some complicated plans. Pencil in hand, he was deep in the various mysteries pertaining to engineering, when he heard Mrs. Benn and the tea-tray. He finished marking off certain lines and strokes on a blank sheet of paper — which he did after a queer fashion, his eyes fixed on the drawing, and his fingers only appearing to guide the pencil — before he went in.

He had not hurried himself, and the tea must be getting cold. Mrs. Benn was in the habit of making it down stairs, so that he had no trouble. It was by no means a handsome tea equipage — partly belonging, in fact, to Mrs. Benn herself. The black tea-pot had a chipped spout, and the black milk-jug had a fray on its handle, and the china tea-cup was cracked across. Oswald's china tea-service had been handsome once — or rather Mr. Bracknell's, for it was to that gentleman the things in the house belonged; but Mrs. Benn had what she herself called a "heavy hand at breakage," and two or three cups and saucers were all that remained. Oswald determined to buy himself a decent tea-set, but some-

how he never thought of it, and the elegant equipage came up still.

He poured himself out a cup, stirred it, and then went for the sheet of paper on which he had been making the strokes and scrawls. Mrs. Benn knew her master well. He had said he was going out, but he was just as likely to remain over these strokes all the evening as to go out; perhaps, even, in forgetfulness keep her tea-things up until ten o'clock, or until she went for them. Oswald Cray was one whose heart was in his profession, and work was more pleasant to him than idleness.

He was busy still over this paper, neglecting his tea, when Mrs. Benn came in again. He thought she had come very soon for her tea-tray to-night. But she had not come for that.

"Here's company now, sir! A young lady wants to see you."

"A young lady!" repeated Oswald. "To see me?"

"Well, I suppose she's a young lady — from what one can see of her through her black veil; but she come to my kitchen bell only, when the knocker was a-staring her right in the face," returned Mrs. Benn. "She asked for you, sir. I said, was it any message I could take up, but she says she wants to speak to you herself."

"You can show her up."

Mrs. Benn accomplished this process in a summary manner. Going down the stairs to the hall where she had left the applicant, she briefly said to her. "You can go up. First door you come to that's open" — and then left the lady to find her way. Had her husband, Benn, been at home, he would have asked her what she meant by introducing a visitor in that fashion to Mr. Oswald Cray; and he would probably have got for answer a sharp order to mind his own business. In

point of fact, Mrs. Benn, on those two dark interludes of her weekly existence, cleaning days, had neither time nor temper to waste on superfluous ceremony.

Oswald Cray had bent over his paper again, attaching little importance to the advent of the visitor; he supposed it might be some messenger from one or other of the clerks. The footfall on the stairs was soft and light; Oswald's back was to the door, and his lines and marks were absorbing his attention.

"Mr. Oswald Cray?"

It was a sweet and pleasant and sensible voice, with a Scotch accent very perceptible to English ears. It was the voice of a lady, and Oswald Cray started up hastily, pencil in hand.

A short, slight, very young-looking woman, with a fair face and blue eyes, stood before him. Strictly speaking, there was no beauty whatever in the face, but it was so fair, so frank, so honest, with its steady good sense and its calm blue eyes, that Oswald Cray warmed to it at once. She was dressed plainly in black, and she threw back her crape veil to speak — as most sensible women like to do. To Oswald's eyes, seeing her by that light, she looked about one or two and twenty, as she had to Mrs. Benn: her light complexion, her small features, and her slight figure were all of that type that remain young a long while. In his surprise he did not for the moment speak, and she repeated the words, not as a question this time —

"You are Mr. Oswald Cray."

"That is my name," he answered, recovering his equanimity. "May I—"

"I come to you from my brother, Frank Allister," she interrupted. "I am Jane Allister."

She pronounced the name "Jean," as she had in fact been

christened, but it generally gets corrupted into Jane by English ears and English tongues. Oswald so interpreted it. His whole face lighted up with a smile of welcome; it may be said of recognition. He had heard so much of this good sister from his friend Frank Allister.

"I am so glad you have come to him!" he warmly exclaimed, taking her hand. "Frank has almost pined for you: but he did not expect you yet. I seem to know you quite well: he has talked to me of you so much."

"Thank you; I'll take it," she said, in answer to the chair he offered. "And I will take off my fur," she added, unwinding a boa from her neck, and untying her bonnet strings. "Your room feels very warm to one coming in from the keen air outside."

There was something in her frank manners that struck most pleasingly on the mind of Oswald. She sat there as confidently in his room as though he had been her brother: a good, modest, single-minded woman, whom even a bad man could not do otherwise than respect.

"Yes, I came before Frank expected me," she said. "I did not think I could have come so soon; but my friends kindly released me. You know my situation — why I could not come to him before."

"I know that you are" — Oswald hesitated for a moment, and then went bravely on. Before that clear eye of plain good sense there was no need to mince the matter, and pretend ignorance.

"I know that you are companion-attendant to a lady. And that you could not leave her."

"I have been companion and maid to her all in one," said Miss Allister. "When I and Frank had to go out into the world and do the best we could for ourselves, I was obliged to look out for what I was most fitted for. Our dead mother's

brother offered to help Frank, and he paid the premium with him to this house, and assisted him otherwise, and I was very glad it should be so —”

“You mean Mr. Brown?” interrupted Oswald.

“Yes. He lived in London. My mother was English born and reared. He was a good friend to us so long as he lived. It was necessary that I should go out; and a situation offered in a lady’s family, Mrs. Graham. She wanted some one who would be her companion, sit with her, read to her, some one well reared, of whom she might make an equal, but who would at the same time act as maid; and I took it. But perhaps you have heard all this from Frank?”

“No, not these past details. Though he has talked of you very much. He has told me” — Oswald broke into a frank smile as he said it — “that his sister Jane was worth her weight in gold.”

“I should be sorry to think that most sisters are not worth as much as I am,” she gravely answered. “I have but done my duty, so far as I could do it, and the worst of us ought to do no less. When Frank found I acted as maid to Mrs. Graham, he was very much put out, and wanted me to give up the situation, and seek a different one. But I laughed at him for a proud boy, and I have stayed on until now. What am I the worse for it? I dressed her, and served her, and when of late years she got ill and helpless, I nursed and fed her. I had become so useful to her — I must say, so indispensable — that when news reached me of Frank’s illness, I could not quit her to come to him. I tried to see which way my duty lay; to leave her for my sick brother, or to leave my brother to strangers, and stay with my dying and helpless friend and mistress. Every week we expected would be her last; she has been slowly dying for these three months; and I felt that it

would be wrong to abandon her. That, you see, is why I could not come to Frank."

"Is she dead?" asked Oswald.

"Oh, yes. This mourning that I am wearing is for her. And as soon as it was possible after the funeral, I came away. We had a long and bad passage, two days, and I did not reach Frank until three o'clock this afternoon."

"You should have come by land," observed Oswald.

"Nay, but that would have cost more," she simply answered. "And I knew that Frank was better, so as to be in no vital hurry for my presence. I have come to you, sir, this evening to ask your opinion of his state. Will you be so kind as to give it me?"

"First of all will you permit me to invite you to take a cup of tea," replied Oswald, turning round to look at the tray, which was on the opposite side of the table, next the door.

"No, I thank you," she replied, "I gave Frank his tea before I came out, and took some with him. But will you let me pour out a cup for you? I saw that I interrupted you."

Before Oswald could decline, she had taken her gloves off, and was round at the tray, putting it in order. That a bachelor had been doing the honours of the ceremony was only too apparent. The teapot was stuck on the side of the tray, spout forwards; the milk-jug was not on the tray at all, but ever so far away on the table. Jane Allister had put all this to rights in a twinkling, and was pouring the slop of cold tea out of his tea-cup into the basin.

"Not for me," said Oswald, feeling as if he had known her for years. "You are very kind, but I have taken all I wish."

"Nay, not kind at all," she said, looking at him with some surprise. "I'd have been glad to do it for you."

Oswald had risen, and she came back from the teatray, and stood by him on the hearth-rug. Her bonnet still untied, her gloves off, her face and attitude full of repose, she looked like one in her own home.

"You'll tell me freely what you think of Frank?"

There was not the slightest shade of doubt in her voice; she evidently expected that he would tell it her; tell it her freely, as she asked for it. She stood with her fair face raised, her candid blue eyes thrown full up to his.

Oswald drew her chair forward for her, and took his own, pausing before he spoke. In good truth he scarcely now knew what was his opinion of Frank Allister. It was one of those cases where the patient seems at death's door, and then, to the surprise of all, the disease takes a sudden turn, and appears to be almost gone. In the previous month, October, Oswald Cray had believed that a few days must see the end of Frank Allister; this, the close of November, he was apparently getting well all one way.

"I do not quite know how to answer you," Oswald began. "Five or six weeks ago Frank was so ill that I did not think there remained the least chance for him, but he has changed in a wonderful manner. But for the deceitfulness that is so characteristic of the disease, I should believe him to be getting well. Remembering that, I can only look upon it as a false improvement."

Jane Allister paused. "I suppose there is no doubt that his symptoms are those of consumption?"

"None."

"And consumption, if it does come on, is rarely, if ever cured. Do you think it is?"

"Very rarely, I fear."

"But again, I have known patients who have displayed

every symptom of consumption, have suffered much, and who have eventually got strong and hearty, and continued so."

"That is true," he assented. "There have been such instances. I wish I could satisfy you better, but indeed I do not know what to think. Mr. Bracknell asked me a day or two ago how Allister was getting on, and I answered as I answer you — that I really could not tell him."

"When I reached my brother's to-day and saw how well he appeared to be, so different from what I had expected to find him, I could not help expressing my surprise," said Miss Allister. "Frank gaily told me that his illness and its supposed danger had been all a mistake, and he had taken a new lease of life. I did not know what to think, what to believe; and I determined to come here and ask your opinion. I could not, you know, ask you before him."

"And I cannot give you a decisive one," repeated Oswald. "I can only hope that this improvement may go on to a complete restoration; and I should think it, but for the treacherous nature of the disease. Frank does certainly appear wonderfully strong and well. Even the doctor cannot say that it will not end in recovery."

"Frank wrote me word that you had caused him to see one of the great London physicians, and that the opinion was unfavourable. But that was when he was at the worst. You have been truly kind to him, Mr. Oswald Cray, and when I came here to-night I felt that I was coming to a friend."

"I should like to be your friend always," returned Oswald, in an unusual impulse. "I seem to have been so a long while, Frank has talked to me so much of you."

"Do you come to see him daily?"

"Not daily; but as often as I can. It is some distance from here."

"It is a long way. But I got misdirected."

"You surely did not walk?" exclaimed Oswald.

"To be sure I walked. How else should I come!"

"There are conveyances — cabs and omnibuses."

"But they cost money," she answered, with that frank, open plainness, which, in her, seemed so great a charm. "I am not come away to England devoid of means, but they will find plenty of outlets in necessary things, without being spent in superfluities. Any way, they must be made to last both for me and Frank, until I can leave him and go out again. I'd not speak of these things to you, Mr. Oswald Cray, but that you must know all the particulars of our position."

She had risen as she spoke, and was now tying her bonnet strings. Oswald picked up a glove which she dropped.

"And now I'll wish you good-night," she continued, putting her hand frankly into his. "And I'd like to thank you with all my heart for what you have done for Frank; for the good friend you have been to him. You have brought to him help and comfort when there was nobody else in the world to bring it. I shall always thank you in my heart, Mr. Oswald Cray."

Oswald laughed the words off, and attended her downstairs, catching up his hat as he went through the hall. Mrs. Benn and her black bonnet came up the kitchen stairs.

"Good-night," repeated Jane Allister.

"I am going with you," said Oswald.

She resisted the suggestion at first, saying she could find her way back quite well; but Oswald quietly carried his point.

He closed the door behind him, and offered his arm. She took it at once, thanking him in a staid old-fashioned manner. Mrs. Benn drew the door open and looked after them.

"Arm-in-arm!" ejaculated that lady. "And he bending of his head down to her to talk! Who on earth can she be? —

coming after him to his house — and stopping up there in the parlour — and keeping up of the tea-things! It looks uncommon like as if he had took on a sweetheart. Only — So it's you at last, is it, Joe Benn! And what do you mean by stopping out like this?"

The concluding sentences were addressed to a respectable-looking man who approached the door. It was Joseph Benn, her husband, and the faithful servant of the firm.

"I couldn't make more haste," he quietly answered.

"Not make more haste! Don't tell me. Mr. Oswald Cray expected you were home an hour ago."

"Mr. Oswald Cray will be quite satisfied that I have not wasted my time when I tell him where I've been. Is he upstairs?"

"No, he is not," she sharply answered. "Satisfied, indeed! Yes, he looked satisfied when he saw me going up to wait upon him in this guise, and to show in his company! And me waiting a good mortal hour for his dinner-things, which he forgot was up! which couldn't have happened if you'd been at your post to wait at table. You go and stop out again at his dinner-time, Joe Benn!"

Joe Benn made no rejoinder; experience had taught him that it was best not. He passed her, and she shut the door with a bang.

CHAPTER XXVI.

More instilled doubt.

THE air was keen and frosty, and the flags of the streets were white and clean — not a common feature in November — as they walked forth. Oswald could but admire this straightforward Scotch girl, with her open speech, and her plain good sense. She was so young in appearance that he could only

think of her as a girl, though she had herself reminded him that she was older than Frank. This, as he knew, must bring her to a year or two past thirty: and in steadiness of manner and solid independence she was two-and-forty.

Reared in her Highland home, in every comfort for the earlier years of her life, she had since had to buffet with the world. Her mother, a widow since Frank was two years old, had enjoyed a good income, but it died with her. The uncle in London took Frank, who was then a youth; and Jane had to seek a situation. It was not easy to find. For a governess she was not qualified, so many of what are called accomplishments are essential now-a-days, and Jane Allister had not learnt them. She had received a good education, but a strictly plain one.

Waiting and waiting! No situation offered itself; and when she heard of Mrs. Graham's she was well-nigh wearied out with the worst of all weariness — that of long-continued disappointment, of hope deferred. But for that weariness she might not have accepted a place where she was to be personal attendant as well as companion. She took it, determined to do her duty in it, to make the very best of it; and when her brother Frank wrote to her in a commotion from his distant home in London, where he was then with Bracknell and Street, she began by making the very best of it to him, gaily and lightly. Frank had the letter yet, in which she had jokingly called him — as she had just related to Mr. Oswald Cray — a proud boy, and recommended him to “bring down” his notions. Frank Allister had never been reconciled to it yet. Jane had grown to like it; and she had remained there all these years, conscientiously doing her duty.

“Have you lost a friend lately?” she inquired, in allusion to the crape band on Oswald's hat.

"Yes," he briefly answered, wincing at the question, could Jane Allister have seen it. All that past time of Lady Oswald's death, and the events attending it, caused an inward shiver whenever they were brought to his mind.

"It is a grievous thing to lose relatives when they are dear to us," remarked Jane. "There is an expression in your countenance at times, that tells me you have some source of sorrow."

Whatever the expression she had noticed on his countenance, she would have seen a very marked one now, had they been, as before, face to face near a table-lamp. The old haughty pride came into it, and his brow flushed blood-red. Oswald Cray was one of the very last to tolerate that his secret feelings should be observed or commented upon. As she spoke, it seemed to him as if the pain at his heart was read, his hopeless love for Sara Davenal laid bare.

"You are drawing a wrong inference, Miss Allister," he coldly said. "The friend I lost was neither near nor very dear to me. She was an old lady; a connection of my mother's family — Lady Oswald."

Jane marked the changed tone. She concluded the loss *was* one of pain to him, though he did not choose to say so, and she gathered her deductions that he was a man of great reticence of feeling. That he was a brave man and a good man, one in every way worthy of trust, of esteem, she knew from Frank long ago.

"Why, Neal! Is it you?"

Mr. Oswald Cray came to an abrupt halt in his surprise. Turning out of the door of a house that they were passing, so quickly as nearly to brush against him, was Dr. Davenal's man-servant. Neal did not appear in the least taken to. He touched his hat and stood still with just the same equanimity,

that he would have done had he been waiting there for the passing of Mr. Oswald Cray.

"What has brought you to London, Neal? You have surely not left Dr. Davenal?"

"Oh no, sir, I have not left. A brother of mine, sir, has returned to England after an absence from it of many years, and a little property of ours that couldn't be touched while he was away, is now being divided. I spoke to Dr. Davenal, and he gave me leave to come."

"Have you been up long?"

"Only three days, sir."

"Are they all well at Hallingham?"

"Quite well, sir. Mr. Cray hurt his arm as he was getting out of the doctor's carriage, and it was bound up for a week. But it is better."

"How did he manage that?"

"I don't think he knew, sir. His foot slipped as he was stepping out, and he swung round in some way, keeping hold of the carriage with his hand bent behind. It was rather a bad sprain."

"Miss Davenal is quite well?"

"Yes, sir. Miss Sara has had a cold lately, and is looking ill. The captain went abroad, sir, without coming to Hallingham, and they all felt it much."

Oswald bade the man good-night, and walked on. He did not care, in his fastidious sensitiveness, to hear the looks of Sara Davenal commented on. If she did look ill, was it for his, Oswald's, sake? — or was she haunted with that unhappy secret which Neal had once so darkly hinted at?

Neal stood within the shade of the house looking after Mr. Oswald Cray, or rather after the young lady leaning on his arm. Neal was very curious as to this young lady, for young she looked in Neal's eyes. While apparently his

whole attention was absorbed by his conversation with Mr. Oswald Cray, he had been studying the face turned to him; a fair and sensible face, as Mr. Neal could read, though less good-looking than Miss Sara Davenal's. What with Neal's legitimate observation and his illegitimate ferreting habits, he had contrived to arrive at a very ingenious conjecture of the tacit relations which had existed between Mr. Oswald Cray and Dr. Davenal's daughter; and Neal had of late been entertaining a rather shrewd guess that Mr. Oswald Cray intended those relations to cease. He judged by the fact that the gentleman had never once, since Lady Oswald's funeral, been inside the doctor's doors. A formal call and a left card during one of his visits to Hallingham, had comprised all the notice taken. Tolerably safe appearances these, from which Neal drew his conclusions; and it perhaps may be pardoned one of Neal's conclusion-drawing mind, that he asked himself whether this young lady had superseded Miss Sara.

"It looks uncommonly like it," he repeated to himself, as his gaze followed them in the distance. "I should like to be certain, and to know who she is. She looks like a lady — and *he'd* not take up with any body that was not one. Suppose I just see where they go? I have nothing particular on my hands this evening."

Gingerly treading the streets, as one who knows he is bent upon some surreptitious expedition is apt to tread them, Neal stepped along, keeping Mr. Oswald Cray and his companion sufficiently in view not to lose them. After a sufficiently long walk, they entered a house on the confines of Chelsea, bordering upon Brompton; the middle one of a row of moderate-sized houses, with small gardens before the doors. Neal saw Mr. Oswald Cray knock; and a young servant-maid admitted them.

But this left Neal as wise as before. He could see the

house, could read the name of the Terrace, "Bangalore Terrace," in large black letters at either end; but this did not tell the name of the lady, or who she was; and Bangalore Terrace, though sufficiently respectable-looking, was certainly not the class of terrace to which it might be expected Mr. Oswald Cray would go for a wife.

Neal might have remained in his ignorance until now, but for a fortunate accident. He was taking a last look at the house ere he turned away, at the light which shone behind the blinds of the first-floor windows, when the same servant who had opened the door came running out, her bonnet just perched on her head, its strings flying, and a jug and latch-key in her hand. As she passed Neal, the unsecured bonnet flew off, and Neal gallantly picked it up.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, sir," she said, civilly. "Nasty tilting things these new-fangled bonnets be! One doesn't know whether to fix 'em a-top of the back hair or under it."

"Can you tell me where a Miss — Miss — It is very unfortunate," broke off Neal in a tone of vexation. "I am in search of a young lady on a little matter of business, and I have forgotten her number. I think she lives at number five, but I am not sure."

"Number five's our house," said the girl, falling readily into the trap. "There ain't no young lady living there. There's three young ladies at number six, sir; perhaps it's one o' them."

"No young lady living at number five?" repeated Neal.

"No, there isn't. There's only my missis, and me, and two sons, and the gentleman what's ill on the first-floor. But perhaps you mean the sick gentleman's sister?" she added, the thought striking her. "She came to our house to-day,

after a long journey all the way from Scotland, and she's going to stop with him."

Neal hardly thought this could apply. The young lady did not look as though she had just come off a long journey.

"I don't know," said he. "What is her name?"

"Her name's the same as her brother's — Allister. If you'd been here two minutes sooner, sir, you might have seen her, for she's just come in with Mr. Oswald Cray. He's a gentleman who comes to see Mr. Allister."

"Allister! The name was conclusive without the other testimony. Neal had once heard Mr. Oswald Cray describe his friend Allister's symptoms to Dr. Davenal. This fair girl with the pleasant face was Miss Allister, then!"

"Ah, it's not the same," said he cautiously. "I must come down by daylight and look out. Good-night, young woman; I am sorry to have detained you," he said as he walked away.

"Miss Allister!" repeated Neal to himself. "And so the brother's not dead yet! I remember Mr. Oswald Cray saying he could not live a week, and that's three months ago."

Frank Allister was sitting between the fire and the table, reading by the light of the lamp, when they entered. He was slight and short, with a fair skin like his sister's, and a long thin neck. The room was very small, as the drawing-rooms (as they are called) in these unpretending suburban houses mostly are. What with the smallness of the room and the heavy closeness of the Brompton air, Jane Allister had felt stifled ever since she arrived that day. Frank, without rising from his seat, turned round and held his thin white fingers towards Oswald Cray, who grasped them.

"Jane, where have you been? I fancied you went out for but a few minutes' walk."

"I thought I would go as far as Mr. Oswald Cray's, Frank,

and thank him for his attention to you," was her answer. "He has been so kind as to walk back with me."

"But how did you find your way," cried Frank, wonderingly.

"I inquired. But I suppose I was stupid at understanding, for I went out of my way. What a busy place London is! I should get bewildered if I lived in it long."

Oswald Cray laughed. "It would be just the contrary, Miss Allister. The longer you lived in it the less bewildered you would be."

"Ah, yes," she answered; "use reconciles us to most things."

She had laid her bonnet and black shawl on a chair, and was going noiselessly from one part of the room to another, putting in order things that Frank had disturbed since her departure. He had wanted a particular book, and to get it had displaced two whole shelves of the chiffonier. The coal-box stood in the middle of the room, and a fancy china ink-stand, the centre ornament of the chiffonier, lay on a chair. But the room, in its present general neatness and order, looked different from anything Oswald had ever seen it. Sometimes there had not been, as the saying runs, a place to sit upon. Frank ill, perhaps careless, had paid little heed to how his room went, and his landlady and his landlady's young maid had not much bestirred themselves in the matter. When Jane arrived she had taken in all the discomfort at the first glance, and did not sit down until it was remedied. Frank's bedchamber was at the back, opening from it, and there was a small room, a closet, in fact, at the bend of the stairs, which was to be Jane's.

Oswald followed her with his eyes, as she moved about in her simple usefulness. Perhaps he wished that he had such a sister to make his home a prettier place than it was made by

Mrs. Benn. She was very small in figure, and the folds of her soft black dress scarcely added to its fulness. Her light hair was carried rather low on the cheeks, and twisted into a coil on her neck behind. Without her out-door things she looked, if anything, younger than she did in them.

"And so you went to Mr. Oswald Cray's, inquiring your way!" cried Frank. "I say, young lady, that's not the fashion of doing things in London."

"May be not," answered Jane. "I daresay I and London shall not agree in our notions of fashion. Have you taken your milk, Frank?"

"I should think so. It was smoked again."

"Smoked?" cried Jane, turning round and looking at him.

"It generally is smoked," continued Frank. "I think their saucepans down-stairs must be constructed on the plan of letting the smoke in."

Jane said no more. She inwardly resolved that neither Frank's milk nor anything else that he took should be smoked in future.

"Why don't you sit down, Oswald. Are you afraid of Jane?"

"Not very much," Oswald answered, looking round at her with a smile. "The fact is, Frank, I have some work to do at home to-night, and must get back."

"Plans to go over?"

"That and other things."

"I shall soon be well enough to come out again and go to work," resumed Frank Allister; and his confident tone proved how firm was his belief in his own words. "Will Bracknell and Street take me on again?"

"I think you will soon be out if you go on improving at this rate," answered Oswald, ignoring the last portion of

Frank's words. "You look better this evening than you have looked yet."

"Oh, I am all right. But, of course, I look better now Jane's here. Nearly the first thing she did was to part and brush my hair, and make me put on a clean collar. Only fancy her coming upon me to-day without warning! When the girl came up to say there was a lady at the door in a cab for Mr. Allister, I thought of anybody rather than Jane."

Oswald Cray wished them good-night, and walked leisurely home. He really had some work to do; but he could have remained longer with them, only that he thought they might prefer to be alone on this the first evening of the sister's arrival. They had been apart for so many years.

Oswald let himself in with his latch-key. It must be supposed that Mrs. Benn heard him; for she came running up the kitchen stairs, and held out something to him under the light of the hall lamp. It appeared to be a piece of narrow black ribbon, about a third of a yard in length.

"When I had got the tea-tray down in the kitchen, sir, I found this a-hanging to it. I suppose the young lady that was with you up-stairs left it here."

There was little doubt that Jane had left it. A wrist-ribbon probably, inadvertently untied in pulling off her glove. Oswald looked at the woman — at her crusty face, where the pert curiosity induced by the visit was not yet subdued. A curiosity he judged it well to satisfy.

"Did you know who that lady was, Mrs. Benn?"

"No, sir."

"It was poor Mr. Allister's sister. She has come all the way from Scotland to nurse him."

The crustiness disappeared; the face lighted up with a better feeling. Mr. Allister had been a favourite of Mrs.

Benn's, and if she could be sorry for anybody's illness she was sorry for his.

"Mr. Allister's sister! If I had but known it sir! What a pleasant-speaking young lady she is."

Following his wife up the kitchen stairs, had come Benn. He waited until this colloquy was over, and then began to speak on his own account.

"A gentleman is waiting for you in your sitting-room, sir."

"Who is it?" asked Oswald.

"I think he's a stranger, sir. I don't remember to have seen him before."

Oswald proceeded up-stairs. Standing at the side of the room, facing the door as he opened it, his gloves on and his hat in his hand, was Neal. And so much like a gentleman did he really look, that Mr. Joseph Benn's mistake was a perfectly natural one.

"I have taken the liberty of intruding upon you, sir, and of asking to wait until you returned, to inquire whether I can convey anything for you to Hallingham. You had hardly left me, sir, in the street, when I remembered how very remiss it was in me not to ask you. Unless I have a letter from the doctor to-morrow morning, according me a day or two's more grace, which I have written for, I shall leave to-morrow evening. If I can do anything there for you, sir, or be of use to you in any way, you may command me."

"Thank you, Neal; there's nothing I want done. I expect to go down myself next week. Come to the fire and warm yourself this cold night. Sit down."

Neal came forward nearer the fire; but he did not avail himself of the invitation to sit. Oswald inquired if he would like some refreshment, but he declined.

"Have they heard from Captain Davenal yet, do you know?" Oswald asked.

"I think not, sir. I believe they were expecting letters from Malta when I left."

"I wish he could have gone down for a short while. I am sure the doctor felt it."

"There's no doubt he did, sir, very much," returned Neal, with warm sympathy in his low, respectful tone. "I grieve to say, sir, that the doctor appears to be very much changed. He is more like one suffering from some inward painful illness than anything else."

"Of body or of mind?" involuntarily asked Oswald, speaking on the moment's impulse. And however he may have regretted the question, he could not recall it.

"I should say of mind, sir. Since the night of — of Lady Oswald's death, he has been a changed man."

Mr. Oswald Cray made no answer whatever to the allusion; he evidently declined to enter upon that unsatisfactory topic. Neal resumed.

"There are going to be changes in our house, sir; it is to be conducted with more regard to economy. Watton is to leave, and I am not sure but I am also. Miss Davenal does not wish any changes to be made, but the doctor says it is necessary."

"On the score of economy?"

"Yes, sir, on the score of economy. I heard him talking of it to Miss Sara; he said if the present rate of expense was to go on, together with the heavy sum that must now go from him yearly as hush-money, he should not keep his head above water. Miss Davenal, who does not understand why any retrenchment should be made, opposes it entirely."

Every fibre in Oswald Cray's heart resented the words — he could not bear that such should be spoken out boldly to

him, no matter what their truth might be. Neal's innocent eyes noted the sudden flush upon his face.

"I think you must be mistaken, Neal. Hush-money! Dr. Davenal would scarcely use the term to his daughter."

"Not that precise term, perhaps, sir, but certainly something equivalent to it. There is a rumour in the town, sir, that he intends to resign to the relatives the legacy left to him by my lady, or part of it."

"Indeed!"

"People have talked a great deal, I fancy, sir, and it has reached the doctor's ears. Perhaps, sir, if I may venture to say it to you, he may be *afraid* to keep it. The injustice of the bequest might lead to some investigation which — which would be inconvenient to Dr. Davenal."

"Neal, I'd rather not enter upon these topics," said Oswald, in a clear, resolute tone. "Things which appear dubious to us may be explainable by Dr. Davenal. At any rate, it is neither your business nor mine."

And by those firm words Neal knew that Mr. Oswald Cray had, so to say, washed his hands of the affair, and did not mean to take it up in any way. Neal's hopes had tended to the contrary, and it was a little check-mate.

"I thought I would presume to ask you, sir, whether you might not be soon requiring a personal attendant," he resumed, sliding easily out of his disappointment, and giving no token of it. "Should I be leaving the doctor, it would afford me greater pleasure to serve you, sir, than any one else, now my late lady's gone."

Oswald laughed — he could not help it. "A valet for me, Neal? No, that would never do under present circumstances. You will be at no fault for a good place, rely upon it, should you leave Dr. Davenal. The good places will be only too glad to contend for you."

Neal did not dispute the assertion. What his precise motive might have been for wishing to serve Mr. Oswald Cray, when he could no doubt dispose of himself so much more advantageously, was best known to himself. He made his adieu in his usual quiet and respectful fashion, and took his departure, leaving Oswald Cray to the reminiscences of the interview. Oswald sat over the fire as oblivious of the work he had to do, as he had been of the dinner-things earlier in the evening. Will it be believed that the hint dropped by Neal — that Dr. Davenal might be giving up the money because he dared not risk the danger of any investigation — was grating unpleasantly on the brain of Oswald? To do Neal justice so far, he himself fully believed that such was the motive of Dr. Davenal, and he had spoken for once with an earnest truthfulness that is never without its weight.

It was unfortunate that this aspect of the affair should have been the first given to Oswald Cray. Had he simply heard that Dr. Davenal was declining the bequest in his generous consideration for the Stephensons, it might perhaps have shaken his doubts of that other dark story, since the only motive the doctor could possibly have had throughout (as Oswald's mind had argued), was the acquirement of the money. But if he was declining the money through fear, it only served to make these doubts the greater. It was most unfortunate, I say, that this aspect of the affair should have been imparted to him; for we all know how little, how very little, will serve to strengthen suspicions once aroused.

He sat on with his unhappy thoughts far into the night, the image of Sara Davenal ever before him. Never had his love for her been more ardently tender, never had the cruelty of their obligatory separation been so keenly present to his soul.

CHAPTER XXVII.

An Inclement Afternoon.

DECEMBER came in with a drizzling rain, which lasted a day or two. A cold, bleak, windy rain, rendering out-door life miserable. As Sara Davenal sat at her chamber window, looking into the street, the shivering and uncomfortable appearance presented by the few passers-by might have excited her compassion.

But it did not. Truth to say, Sara Davenal had too much need of compassion herself just now, to waste it upon street passengers. The greatest blight that can possibly fall upon the inward life of a woman, had fallen upon hers. Oswald Cray was faithless. She knew not how, she knew not why; she only judged by his conduct that it must be so. He had been two or three times to Hallingham, and had shunned her; had shunned them altogether. There could be no better proof. One of the visits he had remained three days; therefore he had not want of time to plead as his excuse. He had called at the door, inquired for Miss Davenal, and upon Neal's answering that Miss Davenal was out, he had handed in cards. For Sara he had not asked at all, and he had not been near the house since.

Sara could do nothing. She could only accept this change in him and bear it in silence. Had she been asked to pin her faith on the truth and honour of any living man, she would have pinned it on Oswald Cray's. Not because she loved him, not because it was to her his allegiance was certainly due, but because she believed him to be, of all others, the very soul of chivalrous integrity. But, that he had changed to her, there could not be a shadow of doubt: his conduct proved it. He

had silently broken off all relations with her, and given no token of what his motive could be.

That some cause, just or unjust, had led to it, she yet did him the justice to believe: he was the last man so to act from caprice, or from a totally unworthy motive. And she knew he had loved her. In vain she asked herself what this cause could be; but there were moments when a doubt of whether the terrible secret, which had been imparted that past night to Dr. Davenal, could have become known to Oswald Cray. If so — why, then, in his high honour, his sensitive pride, he had perhaps decided that she was no fit wife for him. And Sara could not say that he had so decided unjustifiably. Whatever the cause, they were separated.

They were separated. And the sunshine of her life was over. Oh, the bitter anguish that it cost! There is no pain, no anguish, that this world and its many troubles can bring, like unto it — the finding one false, upon whom love, in all the freshness of its first feeling, has been lavished. The bright green of life's verdure is gone; the rich blue has faded from the wintry sky.

Sara said nothing, but the doctor spoke openly of the strange conduct of Mr. Oswald Cray.

"I know nothing that can have offended him," he observed. "Unless he has chosen to take umbrage at the money's having been left to me."

"Nonsense," said Miss Davenal; "it's not that. Mr. Oswald Cray did not want the money for himself; would not, it is said, have accepted it. It is not that."

And "It is not that," echoed Sarah Davenal's heart.

"What else is it, then?" said the doctor. "Nobody in this house has done anything to offend him. *You* have not, I suppose, Sara" — suddenly turning upon her, as a faint doubt flashed into his mind, never before admitted to it.

The question brought to her she knew not what of emotion. She answered it with an outward appearance of calmness, save for the burning red that dyed her face.

"Nothing, papa. The last time I spoke to Mr. Oswald Cray was the night of the accident. We parted quite good friends — as we always had parted."

And the sweet words whispered by Oswald rose up before her as she spoke. What a contrast! that time and this!

"Just so," replied the doctor. "There has been nothing whatever to cause this coolness on his part, except the business of the money. Well, as I give it back to the family, perhaps my gentleman will come round. Rely upon it, that pride of his has been touched in some manner or other."

But the weeks had gone on, and December was in, and the gentleman had not "come round" yet. Sara Davenal sat at her bed-room window, all her shivering misery only too palpably present to her, as she watched the cold rain falling on the wet streets, in the gloomy twilight of the afternoon.

She saw Roger bring the carriage round. She saw her father go out from the house and step into it. It was the open carriage, but the head was up, and Roger and his master were sheltered from the rain. It was not the usual hour of Dr. Davenal's going out, but the bad day had kept patients from calling on him, and a message had just been delivered saying that a lady whom he attended, Mrs. Scott, was worse.

Sara heard the house clock strike four, and the lamps were already lighted in the streets. Night was coming on earlier than usual. The gleaming of the pools of water in the rays of the gas lamps did not tend to add to the cheerfulness of the scene; and Sara, with a shiver that she could not suppress, quitted her room and went down-stairs.

The blaze and warmth of the dining-room, as seen through the open door, was a welcome sight. She went in, and knelt

down before the fire on the hearth-rug, and laid her aching head for shelter against the side of the marble mantel-piece, and stayed there until disturbed by the entrance of Miss Davenal.

"Neal's come home," announced Miss Davenal.

"Is he?" apathetically answered Sara.

"I saw him go by with his portmanteau. What are you down there for, Sara, roasting your face? Have you no regard for your complexion?"

"I am not roasting it, aunt. My face is quite in the shade."

"But you are roasting it. What's the use of telling me that? Had I allowed the fire to burn my face at your age, do you suppose I should have retained any delicacy of skin? Get up from the fire."

Sara rose wearily. She sat down in a chair opposite to the one her aunt had taken, and let her hands fall listlessly in her lap.

"Have any patients been here this afternoon?"

"I think not, Aunt Bettina. I suppose it was too wet for them to come out."

"Have you been drawing?"

"Not this gloomy day. I like a good light for it."

"It strikes me you have become very idle lately, Miss Sara Davenal! Do you think that time was bestowed upon us to be wasted?"

A faint blush rose to Sara's cheek. In these, the early days of her bitter sorrow, she feared she had been idle. What with the shock brought upon her by that ominous secret, and the cruel pain caused by the falsity of Oswald Cray, her tribulation had been well-nigh greater than she could bear.

"Ring the bell," said Miss Davenal.

Sara rose from her chair and rang it. It was answered by Jessy.

"Tell Neal I shall be glad to see him."

Neal appeared in answer to the summons. His London journey had been prolonged by the permission of the doctor, and he had but now returned. In he came, just the same as usual, his white neck-tie spotless, his black clothes without a crease.

"So you are back, Neal," said Miss Davenal. "I am very glad to see you. And pray have you arranged all your business satisfactorily? — secured your share of the money?"

"Entirely so, thank you, ma'am," replied Neal, advancing nearer to his mistress that he might be heard. "I am pleased to find all well at home, ma'am."

"You have been away longer than you intended to be, Neal."

"Yes, ma'am. I wrote to my master stating why it was necessary that I should, if possible, prolong my stay, and he kindly permitted it. I saw Mr. Oswald Cray, ma'am, while I was in London," Neal added as a gratuitous piece of information.

"You did what?" asked Miss Davenal, while Sara turned and stood with her back to them, looking at the fire.

"I saw Mr. Oswald Cray, ma'am."

"Oh, indeed. And where did you see him?"

"I met him one night in London, ma'am. He was walking with a young lady."

"Saw him walking at night with a young lady?" repeated Miss Bettina, in rather a snappish tone — for as a general rule she did not approve of young ladies and gentlemen walking together, especially at night.

"She seemed a very nice young lady, ma'am, young and pretty," continued Neal, who was getting a little exasperated

at the face of Miss Sara Davenal being hidden from his view. "I believe it was Miss Allister, the sister of a gentleman with whom Mr. Oswald Cray is very intimate."

"Well, I am glad you are back, Neal," concluded Miss Davenal. "Things have gone all at sixes and sevens without you."

Neal retired. And Sara, in her still attitude before the fire, repeated the words over and over again to her beating heart. A lady young and pretty! walking with him in the evening hours — the sister of the friend with whom he was so intimate! She laid her hand upon her bosom, if that might still the tumult within, in all the sickness of incipient jealousy. Until that moment Sara Davenal had never known how she had clung to hope in her heart of hearts. While saying to herself, he is lost to me for ever, this under-current of hope had been ever ready to breathe a whisper that the cloud might sometime be cleared up, that he might return. Now the scales were rudely torn from her eyes, and reason suggested that his slighting treatment of her might proceed from a different cause than any she had ever glanced at.

"What was it Neal said, Sara? That the pretty lady walking with Oswald Cray was somebody's sister?"

Sara turned in her pain to answer her aunt. "Mr. Allister's sister, he said."

"Who's Mr. Allister?"

"A sick gentleman who used to be at Bracknell and Street's. I remember that night of the railway accident, Mr. Oswald Cray was obliged to return to town because he had promised to spend — to spend the Sunday with him."

An idea darting into her brain had caused her to hesitate. Had Oswald Cray's anxiety to return to town been prompted by the wish to be with the sister, as well as the brother? Sara felt her brow turn moist and cold.

"Young and pretty!" repeated Miss Davenal. "Who knows but they may be engaged? Ah! it's Caroline who should have had Oswald Cray."

Meanwhile Dr. Davenal had been driven to the house of Mrs. Scott. It was not very far from his own home, about two streets only. Time had been, and not so far back, when Dr. Davenal would not have thought of ordering his carriage for so short a distance, would have braved the inclemencies of the weather, the drifting rain, the cutting wind, and walked it. But the doctor had been growing ill both in body and mind; since the night of that fatal revelation, whatever it may have been, he seemed to have become in feelings like an old man, needing all the care and help of one. As he had looked from his window that afternoon, a sort of shudder at the out-door weather came over him; a feeling as if he could not and ought not to venture out in it. And he told Roger to bring round the carriage.

He stepped out of the carriage and entered Mrs. Scott's, leaving Roger snugly ensconced under the shelter of the head and the horses steaming in the rain. But when the doctor reached his patient's bed, he found her so considerably and alarmingly worse that he could not yet think of leaving her. She was a great and real sufferer; not as poor Lady Oswald had been, an imaginary one; and in the last week or two her symptoms had assumed a dangerous character. The doctor thought of Roger and his horses, and went down.

"I shall not be ready to come home this hour, Roger. Better go back and put the horses up. You can come for me at five."

So Roger, nothing loath, turned his horses round and went home. And Dr. Davenal, with another shudder, and a very perceptible one, hastened in-doors from the beating rain.

"What's the matter with me this afternoon?" he asked,

half angry that any such sort of sensation should come over him.

Is the body at times more sensitive to outward influences than it is at others, rendering it susceptible to take any ill that may be abroad? Is it more liable to cold, to fever, to other ailments? Or can it be that the mind has so great an influence over the body that the very fact of dreading these ills predisposes us to take them? If ever Dr. Davenal sensibly shrunk from an encounter with the out-door weather, it was on that afternoon. He could not remember so to have shrunk from it in all his life.

Mrs. Scott's room was hot. The fire was large, every breath of air excluded, and two large gas burners flamed away, adding to the heat. As Dr. Davenal sat there he became first at ease in the genial warmth, then hot, and subsequently as moist as though he were breathing the atmosphere of a baker's oven. He had had many a battle with this same Mrs. Scott over the heated rooms she loved to indulge in, but he had not conquered yet.

It was not much above half-past four when the doctor was beckoned out of the room. He was wanted down-stairs. There stood Julius Wild, and Mr. Julius Wild was in as white a heat with running, as Dr. Davenal was with that pernicious atmosphere above.

"I have been about everywhere, sir, trying to find you," he began, out of breath. "At last I bethought myself of asking your coachman at the stables if he knew, and he said you were at Mrs. Scott's. You are wanted in the accident-ward, sir, as quick as you can get there."

"What has come in?" inquired Dr. Davenal.

"A young man fell on his head from the very top of that scaffolding in High Street, sir. It is a dreadful case, and the house surgeon does not think he can be saved, even with

the operation. The top of the head is crushed in. Mr. Berry and Dr. Ford and some more are there, but they wish for you."

Dr. Davenal did not delay a moment. In a case of real necessity he threw aside all thought of precaution for himself. If human skill could save the life of this poor young man, he knew that his could, and he knew that perhaps his was the only hand in Hallingham which could successfully carry through the critical and delicate operation he suspected must be performed.

He had no great-coat with him, and he started off at once with Julius Wild, heated as he was. The rain beat against him in a torrent, for it poured now; the wind whirled itself in eddies about his person. No umbrella could live in it; one which the doctor had borrowed from the hall of Mrs. Scott was turned inside out ere he had taken many steps.

"A rough night, sir," remarked the young embryo surgeon, as he kept by his side.

"It is that," said Dr. Davenal.

Away they splashed through the muddy pools in the streets. It was quite dark now, with the unusually gloomy evening, and the gas lamps only served to mislead their eyesight in the haste they had to make. There could be no waiting to pick the way. The infirmary was at a considerable distance from Mrs. Scott's, and ere they reached it the cold had struck to one of them. The one was not Julius Wild.

When they came in view of the Infirmary, Julius Wild ran forward to give notice that the doctor was approaching. Two or three of the medical men were in the great hall looking out for him; Mark Cray was one of them. The news of the accident had travelled in the town, and the surgeons attached to the Infirmary were collecting there.

"We began to despair of you," cried Dr. Ford, "and

there's no time to be lost. I was just recommending Mr. Cray to be the one to officiate."

Dr. Davenal turned his eye with an eagle glance on Mark Cray ere the words had well left Dr. Ford's lips. The look, the warning conveyed in it, was involuntary. Had Mark actually acceded to the recommendation, the look could scarcely have been sterner. Mark coloured under it, and his thoughts went back to Lady Oswald. Never, in Dr. Davenal's presence, must he attempt to try his skill again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Last Meeting.

THE night's work told on Dr. Davenal. The soaking rain, the chilling wind, had struck inwards the perspiration which Mrs. Scott's heated room had induced. On the next day he was visibly ill. Sara noticed it, and begged him not to go out.

"Not go out, child? I must go out."

"But you are not in a state for it. I am sure you are very ill."

"I caught cold last night; that's what it is. It will go off in a day or two."

"Yes, if you will lie by and nurse yourself. Not if you go out to make it worse."

"I have never lain by in all my life, Sara. A doctor has no time for it. What would become of my patients?"

He went out to his carriage, then waiting for him. The close carriage. Bright as the day was — for the weather had changed — it was the close carriage that had been ordered round by the doctor.

"Is master ill, I wonder?" thought Roger, when he found it was only to pay the daily round of near visits.

As the doctor went out at the gate, it happened that Oswald Cray was passing. And Mr. Oswald Cray quite started when he saw Dr. Davenal, the change in him was so great.

It was impossible for either of them to pass the other, had they so wished it, without being guilty of absolute rudeness, and they stopped simultaneously.

"You are ill, Dr. Davenal?" exclaimed Oswald, speaking impulsively.

"Middling. I have got a cold hanging about me. We have had some bad weather here."

It cannot be denied Dr. Davenal's tone and manner betrayed a coldness never yet offered to Oswald Cray. Generous man though he was by nature, as little prone to take offence as most people, he did think that Oswald Cray's slighting conduct had been unjustifiable, and he could not help showing his sense of it.

They stood a moment in silence, Oswald marking the ravages illness or something else had made on the doctor's face and form. His figure was drooping now, his face was careworn; but the sickness looked to be of mind, more than of body. Unfortunately those miserable suspicions instilled into Oswald Cray's brain arose now with redoubled force, and a question suggested itself—could anything save remorse change a man as he had changed, in the short space of time?

"You are a stranger now, Mr. Oswald Cray. What has kept you from us?"

"The last time I called you were all out," he answered, somewhat evasively.

"And you could not call again! As you please, of course," continued the doctor, as Oswald's face took a somewhat repellent turn, and the Oswald pride became rather too con-

spicuous. "I had wished to say a word or two to you with regard to the will made by Lady Oswald; but perhaps you do not care to hear it."

"Anything that you, or I, or any one else can say, will not alter the will, Dr. Davenal. And it does not in the least concern me."

"But I think you are resenting it in your heart, for all that."

Ah, what cross-purposes they were at! Oswald had not resented that; and all his fiery pride rose up to boiling heat at being accused of it. He had deemed that to make Dr. Davenal the inheritor was unjust to the nephews of Lady Oswald, and he had felt for them; but he had not *resented* it, even at heart. He spoke the literal truth when he said it was a matter that did not concern him. If the heavy cloud of misapprehension between them, could not have cleared itself away!

"Will you be kind enough to understand me once for all, Dr. Davenal?" he haughtily said. "Lady Oswald's money, either before her death or after it, never was, nor could be, any concern of mine. I do not claim a right to give so much as an opinion upon her acts in regard to it; in fact I have no such right. Had she chosen to fling the money into the sea, to benefit nobody, she might have done so, for any wish of mine upon the point. I felt a passing sorrow for the Stephensons when I saw their disappointment, but I did not permit myself to judge so far as to say that Lady Oswald had done wrong. It was no affair of mine," he emphatically added, "and I did not make it one."

In spite of his impressive denial, Dr. Davenal did not believe him. Whence, else, the haughty resentment that shone forth from every line of his features? Whence, else, his studied absence from the house, his altogether slighting

conduct? Dr. Davenal made one more effort at concession, at subduing his unfounded prejudices.

"I can assure you I resented the will — if I may so say it. I resented it for the Stephensons' sake, and felt myself a pitiful usurper. Nothing would have induced me to accept that money, Mr. Oswald Cray; and steps are being taken to refund it, every shilling, to the Stephensons."

"Ah," remarked Oswald, "I heard something of that. Had it been willed to me I should have done the same."

He held himself rigidly erect as he said it. There was no unbending of the hard brow, there was no faint smile to break the haughty curve of the lip. That poisonous hint dropped by Neal — that the money was about to be restored through *fear* — was uncomfortably present to Oswald then. Dr. Davenal saw that the resentment, whatever its cause, was immovable, and he stepped into his carriage without shaking hands.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Oswald Cray."

And then the reaction set in, in Oswald Cray's mind, and he began to blush for his discourtesy. The care-worn face, the feeble form, haunted him throughout the day, and he began to ask himself, what if all his premises were wrong — if appearances and Neal's tale had been deceitful — if he had done the doctor grievous ill in his heart? It was but the reaction, I say, the repentance arising from his own haughty discourtesy, which he felt had been more offensively palpable than it need have been; but it clung to him for hours, haunting him in all the business that he had to transact.

It was somewhat strange, that just when this new feeling was upon him he should encounter Sara Davenal. They met in a lonely place — the once-famed grave-yard at the back of the Abbey.

His business for the day over, Oswald Cray was going to

pay a visit to Mark and his wife. He was nearer the back of the Abbey than the front, and, ignoring ceremony, intended to enter by the small grated door, a relic of the old Abbey, which divided the grave-yard from one of the long Abbey passages. In passing the tombstone already mentioned, Oswald turned his eyes down upon it: in the bright moonlight—for never had the moon been brighter—he could almost trace the letters: the next moment, a noise in front attracted his attention—the closing of the grated door. There stood Sara Davenal. She had stayed with Mrs. Cray later than she intended, and was hastening home to dinner: in leaving the Abbey by this back entrance, a few minutes of the road were saved.

They met face to face. Sara's heart stood still, and her countenance changed from white to red with emotion. And Oswald?—all the love that he had been endeavouring to suppress returned in its deepest force.

Ah, it is of no use! Try as we may, we cannot evade the laws of nature; we cannot bend them to our own will. In spite of the previous resolutions of weeks to forget her, Oswald Cray stood there knowing that he loved her above everything on earth.

“How are you, Sara?”

He put out his hand to her in all calm self-possession; he spoke the salutation with quiet equanimity; but as Sara looked in his face, she knew that his agitation was not in reality less than hers. She said a few confused words in explanation of her being there at that hour and alone. On calling that afternoon, she had found Caroline not well, and had stayed with her to the last moment, as Mark was in the country.

Then for a whole minute there was a silence. Perhaps

neither *could* speak. Sara put an end to it by turning towards the gate.

"You will let me see you home, as you are alone?"

"No, thank you," she answered. "There is nothing to hurt me. It is as light as day."

He did not press it. He seemed half paralysed with indecision. Sara wished him good night, and he responded to it, and once more shook hands, all mechanically.

But as she was going through the gate, she turned to speak, a question having occurred to her. One moment longer, and he had arrested her progress.

"There are two or three books at our house belonging to you," she said. "What is to be done with them? Shall they be sent to the Apple Tree?"

He caught her hands; he drew her from the gate into the bright moonlight. He could not let her go without a word of explanation; the cruelty of visiting upon her her father's sin was very present to him then.

"Are we to part thus for ever, Sara?"

Surely that question was cruel! It was not she who had instituted the parting; it was himself. She did not so much as know its cause.

"May we not meet once in a way, as friends?" he continued. "I dare not ask for more now."

That he loved her still was all too evident. And Sara took courage to gasp forth a question. In these moments of agitation the cold conventionalities of the world are sometimes set aside.

"What has been the matter? How have we offended you!"

"*You* have not offended me," he answered, his agitation almost irrepressible. "I love you more than I ever did; this one moment of meeting has proved it to me. I could lay down

my life for you, Sara; I could sacrifice all, save honour, for you. And you? You have not changed? — you love me still?"

"Yes," she gasped, unable to deny the truth, too miserable to care to suppress it.

"And yet we must part! we must go forth on our separate paths, striving to forget. But when our lives shall end, Sara, we shall neither of us have loved another as we love now."

Her very heart seemed to shiver; the fiat was all too plainly expressed. But she stood there quietly, waiting for more, her hand in his.

"I would have forfeited half my future life, I would have given all its benefits to be able to call you mine. The blow upon me has been very bitter."

"What blow?" she murmured.

"I cannot tell it you," he cried, after a struggle. "Not to you can I speak of it."

"But you must," she rejoined, the words breaking from her in her agony. "You have said too much, or too little."

"I have — Heaven help me! Can you not guess what it is that has caused this?"

"N—o," she faltered. But even as the word left her lips there rose up before her the secret of that dreadful night — with the suspicion that Oswald had in some unaccountable manner become cognisant of it.

"I loved you as I believe man never yet loved, Sara; I looked forward to years of happiness with you; I expected you to be my wife. And — and — I cannot go on!" he broke off. "I cannot speak of this to you."

The tears were rolling down her pale face. "You must not leave me in suspense, Oswald. It may be better for us both that you should speak out freely."

Yes, it might be better for them both; at any rate, he felt that no choice was left to him now. He drew nearer to her and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Is there no — Heaven pardon me for speaking the word to you, Sara! — disgraceful secret attaching now to — to your family? One which would render it impossible for a man of honour to ——"

He would not say more; he had said enough; and he felt the words to his heart's core. Whatever pain they may have brought to her, they inflicted tenfold more upon him. With a low cry, she flung her hands before her face.

"Is it so, Sara?"

"It is. How did you hear of it?"

"The whisper came to me. Some people might — might — call it murder."

"No, no!" she broke forth in her pain. "It surely was not so bad as that. They kept the details from me, Oswald; but it could not have been so bad as that."

The words fell on his heart like an ice-bolt. Unconsciously to himself he had been hoping that she might disprove the tale. For that purpose he had whispered to her of the worst: but it seemed that she could not deny it. It was quite enough, and he quitted the subject abruptly.

"God bless you, my darling, for ever and for ever," he said, taking her hands in his. "I do not respect or love you less; but I cannot — I cannot — you know what I would say. It is a cruel fate upon me, as upon you; and for the present, for both our sakes, it may be better that our paths in life should lie apart. After awhile we may meet again, as friends, and continue to be such throughout life."

The tears had dried on her face, as it was lifted in the moonlight, its expression one living agony. But there was no resentment in it; on the contrary, she fully justified him.

Her hands lingered in his with a farewell pressure, and she strove to re-echo the blessing he had given.

They parted, each going a different way. Oswald Cray, in no mood for the Abbey now, struck off towards the Apple Tree; Sara, drawing her veil over her face, went on to her home.

And so the dream was over. The dream which she had long been unconsciously cherishing, of what a meeting between them might bring about, was over; and Sara Davenal had been rudely awakened to stern reality.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A Special Favour for Neal.

THE whole night subsequent to the meeting in the Abbey grave-yard with Oswald Cray, did Sara lie awake, striving to battle with her pain. It was very sore to bear. She knew now the cause of his absenting himself; and she knew that they were lost to each other for ever. It is the worst pain that a woman can be called upon to endure: no subsequent tribulation in life can equal its keen anguish.

Ten times in the night she prayed for help — for strength to support, and live, through her mind's trouble. She did not pray that it might be taken from her; that was hopeless; she knew that weeks and months must elapse before even the first brunt would lose its force; that years must roll on before tranquillity could come.

She did not blame Oswald Cray. She believed that that unhappy secret, of the precise nature of which she was yet in ignorance, had become known to him: how, she could not conjecture. Perhaps he knew it in all its terrible details — and that these were terrible, she doubted less now than ever. Were they not — ay, she fully believed it! — shortening her

father's life? What had been that awful word spoken by Oswald Cray? — though she could not believe it to be so bad as that. But she knew that it was something to bring disgrace and danger in its train; and she fully justified Oswald Cray in the step he had taken. Still she thought that he should have come to her in the first onset and plainly said, such and such a thing has come to my knowledge, and therefore we must part. He had not done this; he had left her for weeks to the slow torture of suspense — and yet that very suspense was more tolerable than the certainty now arrived at. Oh, the dull dead pain that lay on her heart! — never for a long long while to be lifted from it.

She strove to reason calmly with herself; she essayed to mark out what her future course should be. She knew that there was nothing at present but to bear her burden and hide it from the world's eye; but she would do her duty all the same, Heaven helping her, in all the relations of life; she would strive nobly to take her full part in life's battle, whatever the inward struggle.

There is no doubt that in that night of tribulation she looked at the future in its very darkest aspect. It was well, perhaps, that it should be so, for the horizon might clear a little as she went on. That Mr. Oswald Cray would in time marry, she had no right to doubt — a word or two of his had almost seemed to hint at it: man forgets more easily than woman.

Towards morning she dropped into a heavy sleep, and had slept longer than usual. This caused her to be late in dressing, and brought upon her the reproof of punctual Miss Bettina. She looked at herself in the glass ere she went down; at her pale face, her heavy eyelids; hoping, trusting they would escape observation. What a happy thing it is, that others cannot read our faces as we read them!

Miss Bettina was at the head of the breakfast-table. She

was suffering from a cold; but, ill or well, she was sure to be at her post; and Dr. Davenal stood at the fire, his elbow on the mantel-piece, his forehead leaning on his hand.

Sara went up to him, and he seemed to rouse himself from a reverie as he kissed her. She noticed how ill he looked.

"Papa, I am sure you are worse?"

"I don't feel very well, child."

"If you would but stay at home for a day or two and nurse yourself!"

"Ah! I have not time. There's a great deal of sickness about, and my patients must not be neglected."

"Mark Cray can attend to them."

"To the light cases he could. Not the serious ones; I wouldn't trust them to him."

"Not trust them to him?" echoed Sara.

The surprised tone of the question aroused Dr. Davenal; he had spoken out too heedlessly his real thoughts. "People dangerously ill have naturally more confidence in me than in a young man," he said, by way of doing away with the impression his avowal might make.

They took their places at the breakfast-table, neither of them able to eat; the doctor from sickness of body, for he was really ill; Sara from sickness of mind.

"Aunt Bettina, I tell papa he ought not to go out to-day."

"Not going out to-day?" repeated Miss Bettina. "Why not? What's he going to do, then?"

"I say he ought not to go out. He is not well enough."

Miss Bettina heard this time. She raised her eyes and gazed at the doctor. It was impossible not to see that he did look ill.

"What's the matter with you, Richard?"

"It is only my cold," said the doctor. "It has settled here," touching his chest.

"That's just where mine is settling," grimly returned Aunt Bettina.

"Papa's eating nothing," said Sara.

"As if I could eat, with the skin off my throat and chest!" retorted Miss Bettina, mistaking the words, as usual. "It seems that nobody's eating this morning; you are not; we might as well not have had the breakfast laid. Toast was made to be eaten, Miss Sara Davenal, not to be wastefully crumbled into bits on the plate. I suppose *you* have not got a cold?"

Sara began to pick up the crumbs and the pieces, and to swallow them as she best could. Anything to escape particular observation.

"I wonder how Mrs. Cray is this morning?" she presently observed, having ransacked her brains for a subject to speak upon. Miss Bettina heard all awry.

"Oswald Cray! Why should you wonder how he is? Is he ill?"

"I said Mrs. Cray, aunt;" and she would have given much to hide the sharp bright blush that the other name brought to her face. "I told you last evening Caroline was not well. I think you always mistake what I say."

"No, I don't mistake. But you have got into a habit of speaking most indistinctly. My belief is you did say Oswald Cray. He is in town," fiercely added Miss Bettina, as if the fact strengthened her proposition.

"Yes, he is in town," assented Sara, for her aunt was staring so very fixedly at her that she felt herself obliged to say something. "At least he was in town yesterday."

"Where did you see him, Sara?" asked the doctor.

"I met him as I was leaving the Abbey last evening, papa," she replied, not daring to look up as she said it.

"I met him yesterday also," observed Dr. Davenal. "He

was passing the gate here just as I was about to step into the carriage. He is a puzzle to me."

Miss Bettina bent her ear. "What's a puzzle to you, doctor?"

"Oswald Cray is. I had the very highest opinion of that man. I could have answered for his being the soul of honour, one entirely above the petty prejudices of the world in ordinary. But he has lost caste in my eyes: has gone down nearly cent. per cent."

"It's his pride that's in fault," cried Miss Bettina. "He's the proudest man living, old Sir Philip of Thorndyke excepted."

"What has his pride to do with it?" returned the doctor. "I should say, rather, his selfishness. He has chosen to take umbrage at Lady Oswald's having left her money to me; and very foolish it was of her, poor thing, to do it! But why he should visit his displeasure ——"

"He has not taken umbrage at that, papa," interrupted Sara.

"Yes, he has," said Dr. Davenal. "I spoke to him yesterday of the will, and he declined in the most abrupt manner to hear anything of the matter. His tone in its haughty coldness was half insulting. Why he should have taken it up so cavalierly, I cannot conceive."

Sara remained silent. She did not again dare to dissent, lest Dr. Davenal should question her more closely. Better let it rest at that: far better let it be thought that Mr. Oswald Cray had taken umbrage at the disposal of the property, than that the real truth should be known.

"I suppose Oswald Cray felt hurt at not being left executor to the will," sagely remarked Miss Bettina. "As to the money, I never will believe that he, with his independent spirit, wanted that."

"He wants his independent spirit shaken out of him, if it is to show itself in this offensive manner," was the doctor's severe remark. "What did he say to you, Sara?"

"Say —?" she stammered, the remembrance of what had really been said between them occurring startingly to her.

Dr. Davenal noted the hesitating words, he noted the crimsoned cheeks; and a doubt which had once before risen up within him, rose again now. But he let it pass in silence.

"Does he intend to come here again, Sara?" asked Miss Bettina.

"I don't know, aunt," was poor Sara's answer. "I suppose he will come again some time."

And in good truth she did suppose he would come again "some time," when the pain of their separation should have worn away.

Sara quitted her seat as she spoke, throwing down a fork with the movement, and hastened to the window.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Miss Bettina.

"It is the postman, aunt."

"The postman!" echoed Miss Bettina sharply, wondering what possessed her niece that morning. "If it is the postman, you need not fly from the breakfast-table in that way, upsetting the things. Do you call that manners?"

"Oh, papa," cried Sara, turning round, unmindful of the reproof in her flush of excitement, "I do think here are letters from Edward! Some foreign mail must be in, for the man has an unusual number of letters in his hand, and some of them look like foreign ones."

She turned from the window, and stood gazing at the room door. But no letters appeared. The postman went out again with his quick step, and Sara, feeling grievously disappointed, returned slowly to her seat.

"Is he gone?" presently asked the doctor.

"Oh yes, papa. He is half-way down the street by this time. He came, I suppose, for one of the servants."

"He didn't ring."

"No. He seemed to go straight to your consulting-room window. Perhaps Neal is there, putting the room to rights."

But Dr. Davenal did not rest so easily satisfied. He opened the door and called down the passage in an imperative voice,

"Neal! Are there no letters?"

Neal came gliding into the room from his pantry two letters in his hand.

"Why did you not bring them in at once?" somewhat sternly asked the doctor as he took them, certain past suspicions regarding Neal and such missives arising forcibly to his mind.

"I was looking for my waiter, sir: I have mislaid it somewhere. Oh, I left it here, I see."

The silver waiter was on a side table; not at all where it ought to be; as if it had been put down heedlessly and forgotten. Neal caught it up and retired. It might have been as he said — that the delay was caused by looking for it, and by that only; and Dr. Davenal, more inclined to be charitable than suspicious, thought no more of the matter.

In the keen disappointment which had come over him, he nearly lost sight of other things. Neither of the two letters was from his son; and he had so fully expected to hear from him by the present mail!

Sara's heart was beating. "Are they not from Edward, papa?"

The doctor shook his head as he laid the letters down. "They are both from Dick, I expect. His holiday letters."

The two letters were respectively addressed to Miss Davenal, and Miss Sara Davenal. The address to Miss Davenal bore evident marks of care in the writing; it was a clear, re-

gular hand, though easily recognisable as a schoolboy's. The address to Sara was a scrawl scarcely legible. Upon opening the letter, hers, Sara found it beautifully written. Until she came to its close she had no suspicion but that it was really written to herself; she supposed it to be a sort of general holiday letter.

“MY DEAR AND RESPECTED AUNT, AND RELATIVES.

“As the joyful epoch of Christmas approaches, marking the close of another half year, we feel how valuable is that time which the best of us are only inclined to regard too lightly. Yet I hope it will be found that I have not wholly wasted the share of it bestowed on me, but have used it to the best of my power and abilities. When you witness the progress made in each branch of my various studies, to which I have earnestly and assiduously devoted my days and hours, I trust that you will find cause to deem I have been no thoughtless pupil, but have done my best to merit your favour and the approbation of my masters. In Greek especially — which Dr. Keen saw fit to promote me to at Midsummer — I flatter myself you will be satisfied with my advancement: it is a delightful study.

“Deeply sensible of the inestimable value of the talents entrusted to me, anxious that not one of them should lie fallow through fault of mine, it has been my constant and earnest endeavour to improve them, so that they may be turned to profitable use in the after business of life. By industry, by perseverance, and by unflagging attention I have striven to progress, and I may say that it is with regret I part with my beloved studies, even for a temporary period.

“I am desired to present Dr. Keen's compliments to you and my uncle, and to convey to you the intelligence that our winter recess will commence on the 16th of this month, on

which day I and Leopold shall hope to return to Hallingham, and to meet you in good health. Leopold regrets sensibly that he will not be able this year to write you his vacation letter: it is a great disappointment to him. He has had a fester on the thumb of his right hand; it is getting better, but still painful. He begs to offer his affectionate duty to yourself, my uncle, Sara, and Mrs. Cray. And trusting you will accept the same from me,

“I am, my dear Aunt,

“Your most sincere and respectful Nephew,

“RICHARD JOHN DAVENAL.

“Miss Davenal.”

A smile stole across Sara's features at the wording of the letter, so unlike Dick, and she turned over the envelope.

“Yes, ‘Miss Sara Davenal!’ Dick has made a mistake in the address. It is written to you, Aunt Bettina.”

But Miss Bettina's eyes were glued to her own letter, which she held open before her. Her lips had drawn themselves in ominously.

“Is it the holiday letter, Sara?” asked the doctor.

“Yes, papa: Richard's. But it is not written to me.”

Dr. Davenal took up the letter. Its writing, almost as beautiful as copper-plate, was as easily read as a book: Master Richard must have taken the greatest pains with it. Miss Davenal's was not so easily read, for it seemed to have been dashed off with a skewer. She threw it on the table in considerable temper when she came to its end, and laid her hand solemnly upon it.

“Dr. Davenal, if you do not return this letter instantly to Dr. Keen, I shall. It is a disgrace to have come out of any respectable school.”

“Who is it from?” questioned the doctor in surprise.

"Who is it from? — from that wicked nephew of yours — Dick. And *you* to encourage him!" she added, directing her severe glance at Sara. "It is meant, I suppose, for you."

In point of fact, Master Dick Davenal had misdirected his letters, sending his holiday letter to Sara, and one intended exclusively for Sara's eyes, to his aunt. Dr. Davenal, in some curiosity, drew towards him the offending letter.

"DEAR OLD GIRL,

"We come home the end of next week hurray! old Keen was for keeping us till the week after and shouldn't we have turnd rusty but its all fixed now, the 16th is the joyful day and on the 15th we mean to have a bonfire out of bounds and shouldnt we like to burn up all our books in it you cant think how sick we are of them, Jopper says hed give all his tin for next half if books and studies had never been invented and Ime sure I would, I hate learning and that's the truth and I havent tried to get on a bit for I know its of no use trying, Greak's horrid, and our greak master is an awful stick and keeps us to it till we feel fit to bufett him its the most hateful bothering languidge you can imagine and I shall never master a line of it and if it werent for cribs I should get a caneing every day, latin was bad enougff, but greak caps it. We all got into a row which I'll tell you about when I come home and we had our Wensday and saturday holidays stoped for three weeks, it was all threw the writing master a shokking sneek who comes four days a week and found out something and took and told Keen but we have served him out, we have had some good games this half taking things together and if we could berry our books and never do another lesson Keens house wouldnt be so bad, Leo and some more of us were trying to wrench open farmer Clupps stable to get at his poney when he ran a rusty nale into his thum, old clupp was off to a cattle

fair by rail and we knew hed be none the wiser if we exercized the pony up and down the common, and a jolly time of it I can tell you we had only we couldnt find the sadle, well leos thum got bad and he hasnt been abel to write for ever so long and hes uncomon glad of it now for it saves him his holiday letter, I had to write mine five times over before it did and I nearly flung it in the fire before Keens face, I never was so sick of anything in my life, its going to aunt Bett this time Keen said it went to uncle Richard at midsummer, good buy till next week darling Sara love to Carry and mind you get a jolly lot of mince pies ready for us.

“DICK DAVENAL.

p. s. hows old Betts deafness, its so cold we hope all the ponds will be froze to ice tomorrow.”

Dr. Davenal burst into a fit of laughter. The contrast between the genuine letter of the boy and the formal one dictated by the master was so rich. Miss Davenal's brow wore its heaviest frown: the letter was bad enough altogether, but the insult to herself, the “old Bett,” could not be forgiven.

“I'll have this letter sent back, Dr. Davenal.”

“Tush, Bettina! Send it back, indeed! We were school-boys and schoolgirls ourselves once. Why, what's this? — here's the postman coming in again! He must have omitted to leave all the letters.”

It was even so. The postman by inadvertence had carried away a letter addressed to the house, and had now come back with it.

But that mistake was a great piece of good luck for Neal; and in truth its occurring on this morning was a singular coincidence. You will agree with me in saying that it was quite a different sort of luck from any deserved by Neal. Poor

Dick Davenal's "sneek" of a writing-master could not stand for honours beside the real sneak, Neal.

Neal had not been at Dr. Davenal's window when the postman came in the first time, as Sara had surmised; Neal was standing in his favourite corner outside, amid the shrubs, having a mind to give himself an airing. It was to this corner the postman had gone, and he delivered three letters into his hands. Neal carried them to his pantry and proceeded to examine the outside with his usual curiosity. Two of them were those he subsequently carried into the breakfast room; on the third he saw the foreign postmark, and recognised the handwriting of Captain Davenal. And, as Neal turned this about in his hand, he became aware of a curious fact — that it was open. The envelope was not fastened down. The captain's seal was upon it in wax, but it did not serve to fasten it. Whether that young officer, who was given to carelessness, had sealed it in this insecure manner, or whether it had come open in the transit, was of no consequence: it was certainly not closed now.

The temptation proved too strong for Mr. Neal. It happened that he had a motive, a particular motive, apart from his ordinary curiosity, for wishing to see the contents of this letter. He had chanced to overhear a few words spoken between the doctor and his daughter some days previously — words which Neal could, as he expressed himself, make neither top nor tail of; but they referred to Captain Davenal, and created the strongest possible wish in Neal's mind to take a peep at the first letter that should arrive from the gallant officer. Neal had not seen his way to do this at all clear; but it appeared now that fortune had graciously dropped the means into his hands. And the temptation was too strong to be resisted.

Hastily reasoning within himself (the best of us are too

prone to reason on our own side of the question, ignoring the other) that in all probability the breakfast-room had not seen or heard the postman, as the man had kept on *his* side the garden, and had not rung the door-bell, Neal risked it, and carefully drew the letter from the envelope.

A small thin note, addressed to Miss Sara Davenal, dropped out of it. Neal was too busy to pick it up: his eyes were feasting on the opening words of Captain Davenal's letter to his father.

"Neal, are there no letters?"

The interrupting voice was the doctor's: and Neal, in an awful fluster, popped the open letter and the thin one under a dish-cover. There was no help for it: he might not delay; he dared not take the letter in, open. So he carried in the other two in his hand, having looked in vain for his customary waiter.

It passed off well enough. Neal returned to the pantry, and finished the perusal of the captain's letter. Then he refolded it, placed the note, which he had *not* opened, inside as before, and amended the fastening with a modicum of sealing-wax, dropped artistically underneath the old seal.

He was at his wits' end how to convey the letter to the doctor, so that no suspicion might rest upon himself. Suppress it he dare not, for the postman could have testified to its delivery when inquiries were made. He was coming to the conclusion that the best way would be to put it amidst the shrubs, as if he or the postman had dropped it, and let somebody find it and convey it to Dr. Davenal, when the postman's knock at the hall door aroused him.

"I don't know how I came to overlook this," said the man handing in a letter. "It had got slipped among the others somehow, and I didn't find it till I was ever so far down the street."

If ever Neal believed in the descent of special favours from the clouds, he believed in it then. The letter brought back by the postman, was directed to Watton. Neal carried it to his pantry, deposited the other upon his silver waiter, and took it to the breakfast-room.

"How's this?" cried the doctor.

"The letter-man carried it away with him, sir, - by some mistake, he says," answered Neal with a steady tongue and unflinching eye.

"Stupid fellow!" cried the doctor. But he spoke in a good-natured tone. None, save he, knew how welcome a sight was the handwriting of his son.

And when Neal carried down the breakfast-things he coolly told Watton there was a letter for her lying in his pantry, which had come by the morning post.

"You might have brought it down," was Watton's answer.

"So I might," civilly remarked Neal. "I laid it there and forgot it."

CHAPTER XXX.

The Doctor's Birthday.

THE dead of the winter passed. That is, Christmas was turned, and January had come in, and was drawing to a close.

Dr. Davenal's state of health was beginning to attract attention. It cannot be said that absolute fears were excited, but people said to each other and to him that he ought to take more care. Especial care of himself he certainly did not take, and he seemed to take cold upon cold. It must not be thought that Dr. Davenal was recklessly neglectful, supinely careless. It was not that at all. But he was one of the many who seem

to have an assured trust in their own constitution; almost believing their state of good health immutable. Other folks are liable to ailments, but *they* have no fear of themselves. This is sometimes notably the case with those who have never experienced illness, who have passed an active life with neither an ache nor a pain.

As had Dr. Davenal. Of a naturally good constitution, temperate in his habits, taking a good deal of exercise one way or another, his mind always occupied, he did not know what it was to have a day's illness. The great blow which had fallen upon him in the death of his son told upon his mind more than upon his body. If it had bent his shoulders and left lines of care upon his face, it had not made him ill. It was reserved for the later calamity to do that—that terrible secret whose particulars none save the doctor knew. *That* had nearly prostrated him—it had re-acted on the body; and when the cold fastened on him the day he had to hasten from Mrs. Scott's hot room to the Infirmary, it laid hold of him for ever.

He could not shake it off. Miss Davenal told him somewhat crossly that he kept catching cold upon cold; but the doctor himself knew that it was that first cold hanging about him. He apprehended no real danger: he did not pay much attention to it. Had he possessed a mind at rest, he might have thought more of the body's ailments, but with that great burden of despair—and, in truth, it was little else—weighing him down, what in comparison was any sickness of body? As to lying by, he never so much as gave it a thought. So long as he could go about, he would go about. He thought of others before himself; he was one who strove hard to do his duty in the sight of God; and he would have deemed it little else than a sin selfishly to stop indoors to nurse himself, when there might be fellow-creatures dying for the want of his aid. It was very easy to say other doctors might attend for him:

we all know how valuable in illness is the presence of the physician we *trust*; and none in Hallingham was trusted as was Dr. Davenal.

And so, with his aching mind and his aching body, he went about his work. It is just possible that a fortnight or so's rest might have saved him, but he did not take it. He went about his work as usual — nay, with more than his wonted activity, for it was a season of much sickness at Hallingham, as it was that winter in many other places. He bore on, never flagging; but he grew weaker day by day, and everybody remarked how poorly the doctor was looking. No fears for his state were aroused indoors. Sara attributed all she saw amiss in him to the burden of that great secret, of which she had only partial cognizance; and Miss Davenal felt cross with him.

For Bettina Davenal suspected neither illness of body nor illness of mind. How should she connect the latter with the prosperous physician? She knew that he had been grieved at the going abroad of his son Edward, a grief in which she by no means joined, deeming that a little roughing it out in the world would be found of wholesome benefit to the indulged son and brave captain; and she rather despised the doctor for regretting him. He was silent, and thin and worn; he had no appetite; his spirits seemed gone; she saw all this, but never supposed it was caused by anything but the departure of his son.

His not eating was made the worst grievance of by Miss Bettina. Once before in an unusual season of sickness, the doctor had — not, perhaps, lost his appetite, but allowed himself no time for his meals. Miss Bettina believed that this was a similar case; that his patients were absorbing his appetite and his energies; and she gave him a good sound lecturing, as she might have given to Dick. Get what she

would for the table, plain food or dainties, it seemed all one to the doctor: he would taste, perhaps, to please her, but he could not eat.

"I can't help it," he said to her one day. "I suppose I am worse than you think."

For the truth, or rather a suspicion of it, had at length dawned on Dr. Davenal — that he was more seriously ill than he had allowed himself to imagine. Unfavourable symptoms connected with his chest and lungs had forced themselves upon his notice on that very morning, and he asked himself what they meant, and what they boded. Had he neglected himself too long?

It was the 24th of January, a notable day in the doctor's household, for it was his birthday, and was always kept amongst themselves. Dick and Leo made the day a plea for the extension of their holidays. The school generally reopened about a week earlier, but of course, as they told their uncle, they could not go back with his birthday so near: they must stay to wish him many happy returns of it. Miss Davenal saw no reason in the plea, and was severe when the doctor allowed it — as he always did; *she* would never keep boys at home a single hour after the school opened. But with Uncle Richard to back them, Dick and Leo did not care for Aunt Bettina.

Yes, it was on this morning that Dr. Davenal awoke to the serious state of his own health. If what he suspected was true, he feared he should not be long in this world.

He said nothing. He went out as usual in his close carriage, which he had latterly used, and forgot not a single call. But he said to himself that perhaps in a few days, when he should have brought through, if Heaven willed, one or two patients who were lying in extreme danger, he might make arrangements for stopping at home and nursing himself.

On this same day the doctor again saw Oswald Cray. He had occasion to give some directions to Mark, missed seeing him at the Infirmary, and told Roger to drive to the Abbey. Upon entering, he found not Mark, but Oswald. Oswald, it appeared, had just called, and was waiting for Mrs. Cray to come down. Mark was out.

Dr. Davenal cherished no resentment. He deemed that Oswald Cray had behaved to him badly, but he had never been of a retaliating spirit, and least of all was he inclined to it now.

The doctor pressed Oswald Cray's hand cordially as he shook it. The thought flashed over him that he would make one more effort towards a reconciliation. A few moments, given to commonplace salutations, and then he spoke.

"This is my birthday, Mr. Oswald Cray. Mark and Caroline are coming to dine with us: will you join them?"

"You are very kind. But I must go up to London by the seven train."

Not a word of "wishing" he could come, or regret that he could not. The doctor noticed that; he noticed also that his tone was more polite than warm. But he did not yet give him up.

"It may be the last birthday I shall see. We shall be glad to welcome you."

"I hope you will see many yet; but I am obliged to return to town. Thank you all the same."

Coldly courteous still! Dr. Davenal, who would not wait, as Mark was out, again offered his hand in parting.

"Some estrangement has come between us which I do not understand, Mr. Oswald Cray. Remember what I say, should this be the last time we speak together, that it is you who have to answer for it, not I."

"One word, Dr. Davenal," for the doctor was turning

away to regain his carriage. "Believe at least this much, that none can regret the estrangement more than I regret it."

"Is it explainable?"

"Not by me," replied Oswald, somewhat of his old hauteur coming upon him. He honestly believed in his heart that Dr. Davenal, in saying these few words, was but acting a part.

"Fare you well," said the doctor as he went out.

"Farewell," repeated Oswald. And they were the last words ever spoken between them.

It was a social family dinner that evening at Dr. Davenal's, and for some of its partakers a right merry one. Mark Cray and his wife were merry as heart could wish, the two boys boisterously so, Miss Davenal gracious. Sara was quiet, the doctor was ill, and a gentleman, whom the doctor had invited after Oswald Cray declined, was grieving over the alteration so conspicuously visible in Dr. Davenal.

This was the Rev. John Stephenson. He was at Hallingham on business, had called that afternoon on Dr. Davenal, and the doctor had pressed him to stay dinner.

When the cloth was removed, and Mr. Stephenson had said grace, and Dick and Leo were up to their eyes in nuts and oranges, Mark Cray stood in his place and made a natty little speech. Mark was fond of making speeches: they were a great deal more to his taste than surgical operations. His present effort lasted five minutes, and wound up with wishing the doctor many happy returns of the day.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick. "Uncle Richard, I hope you'll have a hundred birthdays yet!"

"And plenty of good things for you to eat as they come round, eh, Dick?" rejoined the doctor with a smile.

"Oh, of course," cried Dick, his eyes sparkling. "It always does come in the Christmas holidays you know."

The doctor slightly rose from his chair, leaning with both hands on the table. His manner was subdued, his voice inexpressibly gentle and loving.

"My dear friends, I thank you for your kindness; I thank you from my very heart. I am not well, and you must accept these few words in answer to Mark's more elaborate speech. It may be the last time I shall be here to receive your good wishes or to thank you for them. May God bless you!" — and he raised his hands slowly and solemnly — "May God bless and love you all when I shall be gone!"

The words took them utterly by surprise. Sara bent her head, and pressed her hands upon her bosom as if to press down the sudden sobs that seemed as if they would choke; Dick and Leo stared; Miss Bettina complacently nodded her acknowledgments, she knew not why, for she had failed to hear; and Caroline looked up in wonder. Mark Cray was the first to speak.

"Do you feel ill, sir?"

"Not particularly; not much more so than I have felt lately. I don't think I am very well, Mark."

"You are overworked, sir. You must take some rest."

"Rest may be nearer for me than we think, Mark."

"Oh, papa, don't!" wailed Sara. "Don't speak so, unless you would break my heart!"

Her emotion had become uncontrollable, and the anguish had spoken out. Never until that moment had the prospect of losing her father been brought palpably before Sara, and it was more than she well knew how to bear. In spite of her natural reticence of feeling, of the presence of a stranger, she quite shook with her hysterical sobs.

Miss Davenal was frightened, and somewhat indignant: she bent her head forward. "What on earth's the matter with Sara?"

"Hush, Aunt Bettina," called out Mrs. Cray. "Don't scold her. Uncle Richard has been talking gloomily. He says he is ill."

"Ill! of course he is ill," retorted Miss Bettina, who had contrived to hear. "He won't eat. He is out and about with his patients from morning till night, and then comes in too tired to eat anything. He has not swallowed a couple of ounces of meat all the last week. What can he expect but to be ill? But there's no cause for Sara to burst into a violent fit of crying over it. Will you be so kind as to excuse it, sir?" she added, in her stately courtesy, to the clergyman who was sitting at her right hand.

He bowed. A man who has known long-continued adversity can feel for sorrow, and his heart was aching for the grief of the child, and for the serious change he saw in the father, his benefactor. Mark turned to Miss Davenal.

"It is just what I say, Miss Bettina, that the doctor is overworked. He wants a week or two's rest."

"And what are you good for if you can't contrive that he should have it?" was her answer. "I think you might see his patients for him."

"So I could," answered Mark. "Only he won't let me."

Sara's emotion was subsiding: she sat very still now, her head a little bent, as if ashamed of having betrayed it; the tears dried upon her cheeks, but an uncontrollable sob broke from her now and then. Dr. Davenal had taken her hand under the table, for she sat next to him, and was holding it in his.

"You foolish child!" he fondly whispered.

"Papa, if — if anything were to happen to you — if you were to go and leave me here alone, I should die," was the answer, uttered passionately.

"Hush, hush! My darling, you and I are alike in the hands of a loving God."

She laid her fingers again upon her bosom. How violently it was beating, how difficult it was to still its throbs of pain, she alone knew.

"I met that gentleman this afternoon, the connection of Lady Oswald's whom I saw for the first time the day of the funeral," spoke up the clergyman, breaking the silence which had fallen upon the room. "Mr. Oswald Cray."

"I met him, too," said the doctor. "It was at your house, Mark. I asked him to come here to-day, but he declined."

"He is gone back to town, I think," said Mark.

"He said he was going."

"Did you ask him to dine here, Uncle Richard?" cried Leo.

"I did, my boy."

"And wouldn't he?" rejoined Mark.

"No, he wouldn't. And, mind, I think he *wouldn't*; although he declined upon the plea of having to get back to town."

"My! what a stupid duff he was!" exclaimed Richard. "Did he know there was going to be a turkey and plum-pudding?"

"I didn't tell him that, Dick. My impression is, that he never means to enter our house again," the doctor added in a low tone to his daughter.

"But why?" exclaimed Caroline, who sat on the other side the doctor, and caught the words. "There must be something extraordinary at the bottom of all this."

"Never mind going into it now, Carine," whispered the doctor. "His grievance is connected with Lady Oswald's will, but we need not say so before Mr. Stephenson."

Sara looked up hastily, impulsive words rising to her lips;

but she recollected herself, and bent her head again in silence. Not even to her father dared she to say that his conclusion was a mistaken one.

"Uncle Richard, now that I look at you, it does appear to me that you are changed for the worse," remarked Mrs. Cray. "You must nurse yourself, as Mark says. Hallingham would not understand your being ill, you know."

"True," laughed the doctor.

Caroline Cray, seeing her uncle daily, or nearly so, had not perceived the great change which had been gradually going on in him. But to Mr. Stephenson, who had not met him since the time of Lady Oswald's death, it was all too palpable. As it had been that day to Oswald Cray.

"We must not forget the captain to-day, doctor," spoke up Mark. "Have you heard from him again?"

"Oh yes."

"How does he like his Maltese quarters?"

"I am not sure that he has said. It is not of much consequence whether he liked them or not. The regiment was ordered on to India."

"To India!"

"Yes."

It was impossible not to note the sad tone in which the monosyllable was spoken. Dr. Davenal had begun to know that he and his son should never again meet on earth: the son whom he so loved!

Somehow, what with one thing and another, that birthday evening was a sadder one than they had been accustomed to spend. Mark Cray, as he walked home with his wife afterwards, remarked that it was "slow." But nobody dreamt of anything like fear for the doctor, save his daughter and the Reverend Mr. Stephenson.

"I can never be sufficiently grateful to you, sir," mur-

mured the clergyman, as he was leaving. "Neither can my brother. You have done for us what I believe no other man living would have done. May Heaven reward you, and restore you to health and strength!"

"I did but my duty," answered the doctor. "The money belonged to you, not to me. I am only glad there were no vexatious legal obstacles brought up to obstruct the transfer. I shall always be glad to see you, remember, when you come to Hallingham."

Mr. Stephenson thanked him. But as he went out, the impression was strong upon his mind that the doctor himself would not long be in Hallingham.

And Sara? What must it have been for her? Her mind was one chaos of tumultuous emotion. She seemed to have accepted the fear as a certainty, to have been obliged to accept it. Oh, what would save him? — could not the whole faculty restore *his* precious life? She passed another night of anguish, like unto the one she had passed nearly two months before, after parting with Oswald Cray in the Abbey graveyard — like it, but more apprehensively painful; and she wondered how she got through it.

With the morning, things did not wear so intensely gloomy an aspect. The broad daylight, the avocations and bustle of daily life, are an antidote to gloom, and the worst prospect loses some of its darkness then. Sara tried to reason with herself that he could not have become so ill on a sudden as to be past recovery, she tried to say that it was foolish even to think it.

But her mind could not be at rest, her state of suspense was intolerable, and before entering the breakfast-room she knocked at her father's study-door, and entered. Dr. Davenal was closing the Bible.

"What is it, my dear?"

"Oh papa" — and the words came forth with a burst of pent-up anguish — "I cannot live in this suspense. What did you mean last night? What is it that is the matter with you?"

"I scarcely know, Sara. Only that I feel ill."

"But you — cannot — be going to die!"

"Hush, my child! You must not agitate yourself in this way. Die? Well, no, I hope not," he added, quite in a joking manner. "I feel ten per cent. better this morning than I did yesterday."

"Do you?" she eagerly cried. "But — what you said last night? —"

"Last night I felt gloomy — oppressed. Serious thoughts do intrude themselves sometimes on one's birthday. And I was really ill yesterday. I feel quite a different man to-day."

Her fears were growing wonderfully calmer. "You are sure, papa?"

"Sure of what? That I am better? — I am sure I feel so. I shall be all right, child, I hope."

"Won't you have advice, papa?" she imploringly said.

"Advice? That's a compliment to myself, young lady. Hallingham would tell you that there's no advice better than Dr. Davenal's own."

"But, papa — I mean different advice. I thought of the clever London doctors. You must have them down to see you."

"Some of the clever London doctors would be glad of the countryman Richard Davenal's advice. Seriously speaking, my dear, though I say it in all modesty, I don't believe there's a man in Europe more skilful than myself."

"But they might suggest remedies that you would not think of. O papa! if there's a necessity, do summon them."

"Be assured of one thing, Sara, and set your mind at rest. Should the necessity arise, I will not fail to seek any one or anything that I think may help me. My life has not of late been a happy one, but I am not quite tired of it; I wish I may live long, not only for your sake, but for — for other interests. There's a double necessity for it now."

"And you will not go out to-day, papa?"

"To-day I must. I have not made arrangements to the contrary. But I do mean to give myself a rest, perhaps beginning with to-morrow. I feel a great deal better to-day — quite another man."

How the words lightened her heart! Dr. Davenal really did feel much better, and the saddened spirit, the almost ominous feeling, which had clung to him the night before, had vanished. But he spoke more lightly of his illness than he would have done had he not seen how it was affecting her.

Dick came drumming at the door, and then pushed it open with a bang.

"Breakfast's waiting, Uncle Richard. And Aunt Bett — Why! are you there?" broke off the young gentleman as his eyes fell upon Sara. "I'm afraid you'll catch it. Aunt Bett thinks you are not down, and it's ten minutes past eight."

"Are you ready for school, Dick?" asked his uncle. "Elated at the prospect of returning?"

Dick pulled a long face. The two boys were going back that day. A sore trial to Dick, who, it must be confessed, had been born with an innate antipathy to books.

"You'll have us home at Easter, Uncle Richard?" he pleaded in a piteous tone.

"Not if I know it, Dick. Holidays twice a year were thought quite enough in my school-days, and I see no reason for their not being thought enough now."

"Half the boys go home at Easter — and stop a fortnight," bemoaned Dick.

"Very likely. If half the boys have friends who prefer play to work for them, I'm only glad the other half set a better example. Dicky, boy, you'll enjoy your Midsummer holidays all the more keenly for having none at Easter."

The doctor caught hold of the boy and wound his arm affectionately round him as they proceeded across the hall to the breakfast-room. Miss Davenal greeted Sara with one of her severest aspects, but before she could begin her lecture, Mark Cray had burst in upon them.

"Have you heard the news?" he exclaimed, in a state of excitement never yet witnessed in easy Mark Cray. "Doctor, have you had letters yet?"

"What news? What letters?" asked the doctor.

"Caroline has got her money."

"Caroline got her money?" repeated Dr. Davenal, understanding no better than the rest did.

"The Chancery case is decided," explained Mark. "Judgment was given yesterday, and it is in their favour. She'll get the money directly now."

"How do you know this, Mark?"

"It is in the evening papers — reported in full. I call for my letters sometimes if I am passing the post-office, and I did so this morning and got this paper. White, the lawyer, sent it, I expect, and we shall no doubt hear by this evening's post."

"Well, Mark, I am very glad. Justice lay on Caroline's side, therefore it is right that she should have it. You must settle it upon her as soon as you touch the money."

"Oh, of course," said Mark.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Bad News for Hallingham.

"I SAY, Neal, what sort of a place is St. Paul's Churchyard?"

The questioner was Watton. She sat in the servants' room near the window, against which the rain was pattering, some household sewing in her hand. Neal, who had entered to get a glass he wanted, was rather taken with surprise, but he was not one to show it in his manner.

"Did you never see it?" he asked.

"I saw it in a picture once. I couldn't see it elseways; I've never been to London."

"It is a large space of land with houses round it and the cathedral in the middle," explained Neal, who seemed always ready to oblige his fellow-servants, especially Watton. "It's a thoroughfare, you know: the road from Ludgate Hill to Cheapside winds round on each side the cathedral, between it and the houses."

"Is it very noisy?"

"Pretty well for that. But the London people don't seem to care for noise. I expect they are so used to it that they don't hear it."

"The houses round St. Paul's are warehouses, arn't they?"

"Warehouses and shops. The shops are mostly on one side, and the warehouses on the other."

"Do you know a place called Cannon Street?"

"I should think I do! It leads down from St. Paul's to King William Street. Why do you ask?"

"Well," said Watton slowly, as if she were deliberating something in her mind, "I am not sure but I am going to live there."

"To live in St. Paul's Churchyard?" repeated Neal.

"I have had a place offered me there, and it seems to me to be a very eligible one," said Watton. "It's to go as housekeeper in a house of business; some large wholesale place, by what I can understand. I should have two or three servants under me, and twenty-five pounds a year. It seems good, doesn't it?"

"Capital," assented Neal. "Is it in St. Paul's Churchyard?"

"It's either in St. Paul's Churchyard or Cannon Street. She isn't quite sure which, she says. Any way, it's close to St. Paul's."

"Who's 'she'?" questioned Neal.

"My sister. Her husband is in this establishment, a traveller, or something of that. He has got on well: he was only day assistant in a shop when she married him, fifteen years ago, and now he gets two or three hundred a year. When Miss Bettina told me I should have to leave, I wrote to my sister and asked her to look out for me, and she has sent me word of this."

"But can she get the place for you?" inquired Neal, who was prompt at weighing probabilities and improbabilities in his mind.

"It is in this way. The present housekeeper has been there a good while, and is much respected by the masters, and they have asked her to look out for somebody to take her place. My sister's intimate with her, and has spoken to her about me."

"Why is she going to leave, herself?" questioned Neal, liking to come to the bottom of everything.

Watton laughed. "She is going to begin life on her own score: she's about to be married. I think it's rather venture-

some, those middle-aged persons marrying: I wouldn't, I know."

"Wait until you are asked," returned Neal, not over gallantly.

"I have been asked more than once in my life," said Watton. "But I didn't see my way clear. It's all a venture. A good many risk it, and a few don't. I'd rather be one of the few. My goodness! how it rains!"

"When do you leave here?"

"When I get a comfortable place. Miss Bettina said I was not to hurry. It isn't as if I were leaving for any fault, or to make room for another. *She* doesn't like my leaving at all, you know."

Neal nodded. "I heard her grumbling to the doctor, like anything, about it. She talks loud, and one can't shut one's ears at will."

"She need not grumble to the doctor. It is not his fault. He spoke to me himself, saying how sorry he was to part with me, but he could not help it. 'He had had a severe loss of money,' he said, which rendered it necessary that he should alter the rate of his expenditure. I wonder," added Watton, musingly, "how he came to lose it?"

Neal coughed. "Perhaps some bank broke?"

"Perhaps it did," answered Watton. "They are ticklish things, those banks. I say, Neal, there's the doctor's bell."

Neal heard the bell for himself, and quitted the room to answer it. Watton got up, put down her work, shook a few threads from her gown, opened a drawer and took out a letter.

She was going upstairs to Miss Bettina to show her the letter she had received, and to ask her advice upon the situation mentioned in it. She felt very much inclined to try for

it; only she felt a shrinking doubt of London. Many persons do who have lived to middle age in the country.

Neal entered the room in answer to the ring. The doctor had been out that morning, but returned earlier than usual, for it was not much past twelve. It was the day subsequent to the departure for school of Dick and Leo.

"What a poor fire you have got here, Neal!" said the doctor. "Bring a few sticks and pile the coal on. I feel chilly."

"I hope you have not taken a fresh cold, sir," respectfully observed Neal, as he stirred up the fire preparatory to getting the sticks.

Whether Neal was right or not as to the fresh cold, certain it was, that before night unfavourable symptoms began to manifest themselves in Dr. Davenal. And they increased rapidly.

A few hours and the news went forth to the town — Dr. Davenal was in danger. The consternation it excited cannot well be described — and if described would scarcely be believed. Numbers upon numbers in that town looked upon Dr. Davenal in the light of a public benefactor: they honestly believed that his death would be one of the greatest calamities that could befall them; they believed that, if he went, nobody else could bring *them* through danger, should it come upon them.

They hastened to the door with their anxious inquiries; they saw the medical men of Hallingham pouring in. What was the matter with him? they eagerly asked. How was he seized?

It was inflammation of the chest, or lungs, or both, they were told. It was in fact an increase of the cold which had been so long hanging upon him, and *which he had neglected*. Oh, only a cold! they repeated carelessly as they listened —

what a mercy that it was nothing worse. And they went away re-assured.

A day or two, and there came down a physician from London in answer to a telegraphic dispatch. A day or two more and an ominous whisper went forth to the town — that hope was over. The saddened inhabitants paced to and fro, collected in groups about the door, and glanced up at the doctor's windows, fearing if perchance the blinds should have been drawn since they last looked. They watched the medical men glide in and out; they saw a lawyer go in with a bustling step, and came to the conclusion that he went to make the will. Altogether Hallingham was in a fever of excitement.

But there occurred a change; contrary to even the most sanguine expectation, a change seemed to take place for the better. Dr. Davenal rallied. The most painful symptoms left him, and some of those around him said he was getting well.

One evening at dusk, Neal was observed to come out of the house with a quick movement and hasten up the street. As usual he was instantly surrounded, waylaid by anxious inquirers.

Yes, it was perfectly true, Neal answered, his master was so much better as to surprise all who saw him. The change took place early that morning, and he had been mending ever since. He was well enough to sit up: was sitting up then.

Then there was a hope that he'd recover? the questioners rejoined, scarcely daring to speak the joyful words.

Oh yes, there seemed every hope of it now. Mr. Cray, who had just gone out, remarked to him, Neal, that he looked upon his master as cured. But Neal couldn't stop to talk more with them then, he said; he was hastening to the chemist's for a draught which the doctor himself had sent him for.

Neal got the draught, imparted the news of the doctor's wonderful improvement to the crowd collecting at the chemist's, for no end of gossipers pressed into the shop when they saw Neal there, retraced the streets with his soft tread, and arrived at home. Entering the consulting-room, where the fire in the grate was getting low, he passed on to his master's bedchamber. Quite a bright chamber for an invalid's. The fire was blazing in the grate, and a handsome lamp, shining through the ornamental pink shade that covered its globe, stood on the small round table. The bed was at the far end of the room in a corner, and Dr. Davenal sat in an easy chair near the fire. He was dressed, all but his coat; in place of that, he wore a warm quilted dressing-gown of soft rich silk: one of those rarely handsome dressing-gowns that seem made to be looked at, not to be worn.

He did not appear very ill. Wan and worn certainly, but not so ill as might have been expected. His breath and voice were the worst: both were painfully weak. The table had been drawn close to him, and he was writing at it. A tolerably long letter it looked like, covering three sides of large note-paper. Perhaps, if the truth had been declared, he had got up purposely to write this letter.

Sara sat on the other side the fireplace, ready to wait upon him. How she had borne the agony of the last few days and been *calm*, she did not know, she never would know: it was one of the sharp lessons learnt from life's necessities. "You may be with him," the physician in London had said to her, "provided you can maintain composure in his presence. The witnessing of a child's grief is sometimes the worst agony that the dying have to bear. I cannot sanction your being in the room unless you can promise to be calm."

"I will promise it," replied Sara in a low tone; but that

one expression "the dying" had turned her whole heart to sickness.

Yes, it was one of the lessons that must be learnt in the stern school of life — the maintaining a composed exterior when the heart is breaking. That she was given to reticence of feeling by nature, was of service to Sara Davenal then. But surely the trials that had latterly fallen upon her were very bitter; the battle just now was sharp and keen.

She sat there in her soft dress of violet merino, so quiet and unobtrusive in the sick-room, with its little white lace collar and the narrow lace cuffs turned up on the bands of the sleeves at the wrist. The first day of his illness she had on a silk dress rustling against the chairs and tables, and she had the good sense to go and change it. The chair she sat in was an elbow one, and her hot cheek rested on her fingers as she strove to drive back the inward question that *would* intrude itself, whether this improvement was for good, or only a fallacious one. She sat perfectly still, her eyes following the motion of his feeble fingers, and it was thus that Neal interrupted them.

"The draught, sir," he said, laying it on the table.

"Set a wine-glass by it," said the doctor. "That will do."

So slowly and feebly! The voice seemed to come from deep down in his chest, and not to be the doctor's voice at all. Neal put the wine-glass as desired, and quitted the room; and the doctor wrote on.

Only for a minute or two: the letter was drawing to a close. Dr. Davenal pressed it with the blotting-paper, read it to himself slowly, and then folded it and put it in an envelope. In all this, his fingers seemed scarcely able to perform their office. He fastened it down, and wrote on the

outside his son's name. Then he looked at Sara, touching the letter with his finger.

"My dear, when the next mail goes out, should you have occasion to write of me, let this be enclosed."

"To write of you, papa?" she repeated in a faltering tone. But she need not have asked the question — its meaning had only too surely penetrated to her.

"Should the worst have happened."

"Oh, but — papa — you are getting better!"

She checked the wailing tone; she remembered how necessary, as she had been warned, was calmness in that room; she remembered her promise to maintain it. She pressed her hands upon her bosom and remained still.

"I will take that draught now, Sara, if you'll pour it out."

She rose from her seat, undid the paper, poured the contents of the small bottle into the glass, and handed it to him. The doctor drank it, and gave her back the glass with a smile.

"Not one of those clever fellows thought of ordering me this; yet it's the best thing for anybody suffering as I am. Ah! they have got something to learn yet. I don't know how they'll get on without me."

"Papa, you may get well yet!" she interrupted; and she *could not* prevent the anguished sound with which the words were spoken.

He turned and looked at her; he seemed to have fallen into a momentary reverie. But he made no direct answer.

"Can you draw the table away, Sara? I don't want it so close now. Gently; take care of the lamp."

"Where shall I put this, papa?" she asked, referring to the letter.

"In my desk in the next room. You'll know where to

find it in case of need. My keys are here, on the mantel-piece."

She stopped to ask one question which seemed to be wrung from her in her pain. "Is it to go all the same if you get better, papa?"

"No. Not if I get better."

Passing into the other room, which was lighted only by the fire, she drew the desk from underneath the table, knelt down, unlocked it, and put in the letter. It was addressed: "For my son, Edward Davenal." Sara was locking the desk again, when some one entered the room and came round the table to where she knelt.

"My goodness! are you saying your prayers?"

Wrapped in silks and ermine, her lovely face peeping out from a charming pink bonnet, was Mrs. Cray. The doctor had expressed a wish to Mark Cray that afternoon that Caroline would come to him, and Mark had delivered the message when he got home.

"Mark says Uncle Richard wants to see me," she explained, "so I thought I'd run down at once. I can't stop; Berry and another friend or two are going to dine with us. I am so delighted to hear of the improvement in Uncle Richard! Mark says the danger is quite over."

"If I could but be sure it was!" was Sara's answer.

"There you are, with your doubts and fears! Never was anybody like you, Sara. Don't I tell you Mark says it is? Yes, I'll take my cloak off for the few minutes that I stop."

She threw off her bonnet, and let the cloak slip from her shoulders, displaying her evening attire, for she had dressed before she came out: a silk, so light as to look almost white, that stood on end with richness and rustled as she walked;

the dazzling necklace, given by Captain Davenal, on her white neck; a dew-dropped pink rose in her gleaming hair.

Utterly unaccordant looked she with the chamber of the dying, as she stepped into the other room. Dr. Davenal's eyes were fixed on her for a moment in simple wonder, as if he saw a vision. Then he recognised her, and held out his hand, a glad look pervading his countenance.

"Well, Uncle Richard! I am so rejoiced that you are getting better. You'll come and dance at our housewarming yet."

"Are you going to hold one?" asked the doctor, as he held her hand in his, and gazed up at her beauty.

"Mark and I are thinking of it. We can do everything, you know, now that that money's coming to me."

"Ah," said the doctor, "it's about that money I want to talk to you. Sit down, Caroline. How smart you are, my dear!"

"Nay, I think it's you who are smart, uncle," she returned with a gay laugh. "So it has come into use at last!"

Caroline touched the dressing-gown as she spoke. There had always been a joke about this dressing-gown. A patient of the doctor's, as fanciful as Lady Oswald and nearly as old, had made it with her own hands and sent it to him. It had remained unused. For one thing, the doctor was too plain in his habits and too busy a man to require a dressing-gown at all; for another, he had looked upon the garment as extravagantly fine.

"Yes," said he, in answer to Caroline's remark, "I have found it useful to-day. It is very warm and comfortable. Caroline, I have been talking again to Mark about the money."

"Well, uncle?"

"I don't know that it is well. Mark does not appear inclined to make me any promise that it shall be settled upon you when it comes. I urged it upon him very strongly this afternoon, and he answered me in his light careless manner, "Of course. Oh yes, doctor, I'll remember;" but he did not give a specific promise; whether by accident or design, I cannot say. So I told him to send you down to me."

"Yes, uncle," she said, thinking more of the weakness of the voice to which she was listening, than of the import of the words.

"This money must be settled upon you, Caroline, the instant that you touch it. It is essential that a married woman should, if possible, have some settlement. If I recover, I shall take care that this is so settled, but —"

"If you recover!" she interrupted. "Why, Uncle Richard, you are getting well as fast as you can. Mark says so. You are sitting up!"

"True; I am sitting up; and I could not have sat up two or three days ago. Still, I am not sure about the getting well."

"But Mark says so; he says you are," reiterated Caroline.

"And Mark's opinion, as a medical man, must be infallible, you think," rejoined the doctor, with a momentary look in his face that Caroline did not understand. "At any rate, my dear, it is well to remember all contingencies. 'Hope for the best, and prepare for the worst,' was one of your Grandpapa Davenal's favourite maxims. You must have the money settled upon you —"

"But, Uncle Richard, are you quite sure that it would be for the best?" she interposed. "If the money is settled in that way, it would be all tied up, and do us no good after all."

"You would enjoy the interest."

"That's not over much," said Caroline slightly. "I

and Mark have been planning a hundred things that we might do with the money. Re-furnish the Abbey splendidly for one."

"You and Mark are a couple of simpletons," retorted the doctor, regaining momentarily his energy of voice. But the effort was too much, and he lay panting for several minutes afterwards. Caroline sat gazing at him, her finger unconsciously raised to her neck, playing with the gleaming toy there. Which should she trust to, these signs of illness, or Mark's opinion?

"Caroline, I insist that the money be settled upon you. Were you and Mark to waste it in nonsense, it would be nothing less than a fraud upon your West Indian relatives from whom it is derived. You may tell Mark so from me. That money, Carine, secured to you, would at least keep the wolf from coming quite in, should he ever approach your door."

Caroline sat aghast, wondering whether the doctor had lost his senses. "The wolf at the door for us, Uncle Richard! As if that could ever be!"

"Ah, Carine, I have lived to know that there is no permanent certainty in the brightest lot," he answered with a sigh. "My dear, more experience has been forced upon me in the past year or two, than I had learnt in the whole course of my previous life. Understand me once for all, this money must be secured to you."

"Very well, Uncle Richard," she answered with ready acquiescence. "It shall be so, as you seem so much to wish it. I'll tell Mark all you say."

A few minutes longer, and Caroline rose. Dr. Davenal was surprised that she should be going again so very soon, and looked inquiringly at her. "Can't you stay a little longer, Caroline?"

"I wish I could; but I shall hardly get back to dinner, and we expect some friends to-day. Good-night, Uncle Richard."

He drew her face down to his, murmuring his farewell. Little did Caroline Cray think it would be his last.

Sara went out with her cousin, and saw her depart with the servant who had waited for her. When she returned to the chamber, the doctor was in deep thought.

"I think you must bring the table near to me again, Sara," he said. "There's another word or two I should like to write."

"Yes, papa. Do you want Edward's letter?"

"No, no; it's not to him. There. Dip the pen in the ink for me."

It was a tacit confession of weakness that she did not like to hear; and she saw that even in the short space of time that had elapsed since he wrote before, his strength had visibly declined. He was scarcely able to guide the pen.

"That will do," he said, when he had traced a few lines. "Sara, should you have occasion to send this, enclose it in a note from yourself, explaining my state when I penned it; that I was almost past writing. Will you remember?"

"Yes, papa," she answered, her heart beating painfully at the words.

"Fold it for me."

Honourable in all her thoughts and actions, Sara folded the note with the writing turned from her. It is just possible some children might have been sufficiently actuated by curiosity to glance at least at the name at the commencement of the note. Not so Sara Davenal. She placed it in an envelope and fastened it down.

"I think I can direct it, Sara. Just the name."

She gave him the pen, and he traced the name in uneven,

doubtful letters. Sara noted it with surprise, and perhaps her pulses quickened. "O. Oswald Cray, Esquire."

"Put it in my desk with Edward's, my dear. If you have occasion to send the one, you will the other."

As she unlocked the desk again, her tears were raining down fast. In all that her father was saying and doing there seemed to be a foreshadowing in his own mind of his approaching death. She quitted the room for a few minutes, that her emotion might spend itself, and in the interval Miss Davenal entered. The soft rustling of Miss Bettina's sweeping silks aroused the doctor, who had fallen into a doze. She went up and took his hand.

"Richard, how are you to-night?"

"I hardly know. Middling."

"Sara is fancying you are not so well."

"Is she?"

"But she always was given to fancies, you know. Is it right that you should sit up so long the first time of leaving your bed?"

"Yes, I like the change. I was tired of bed. Sit down, Bettina. There are one or two things I want to say to you."

"Are you finding yourself worse?"

"Bettina, I have not been better."

"The doctors have thought you so," she said, after a pause.

"Ay, but I know more of my own state than they can tell me. When the suffering and its signs passed, they leaped to the conclusion that the disease had left me. In a measure, so it has, but they should have remembered in how many of such cases the apparent improvement is all deceit, the forerunner of the end."

Bettina Davenal fully understood the words and what they implied. But she was not a demonstrative woman, and the

rubbing together of her white and somewhat bony hands was the sole sign of the inward aching heart.

"And I am thankful for the improvement," added the doctor. "It is not all who are permitted this freedom from pain in their dying hours."

"O Richard! is there *no* hope?"

"I fear not," he gravely answered. "I am accustomed to impress upon my patients the great truth that while there is life there is hope, and I should be worse than a heathen to ignore it in my own case. But, all I can say is, I cannot trust to it."

She had laid one of her hands upon the folds of the dressing-gown, and the doctor could feel the twitching of the fingers. He had asked her to sit down, but she preferred to stand. Close to him, with her head bent, she could hear his low words without much misapprehension, so deliberately were they spoken between the panting breath.

"Bettina, I don't go to my grave as I thought I should have gone, providing for my children. I have been obliged to sacrifice all I had put by. It was not a great deal, it's true, for I am but what's called a middle-aged man, and my expenses have been high. Could I have foreseen my early death, I should have lived at half the rate. And this sacrifice will not die with me. The house — I daresay I shall shock you, Bettina — is mortgaged; not, however, to its full value. I have directed in my will that it shall be sold; and the residue, after the mortgage is paid — can you hear me?" he broke off to ask.

"Every word."

"The residue and the proceeds of the furniture, and those two small cottages of mine, and other effects which will be likewise sold, will make a fair sum. There's money owing to me in the town, too. Altogether I expect there will not be much less than three thousand pounds —"

"Richard!" shrieked out Miss Bettina, in her emotion. "Three thousand! I thought you were worth ten at least."

"No, it was not so much as that altogether. I had four or five thousand put by. Never mind: I say I have had to sacrifice it. I feel how imprudent I have been, now that it is too late."

"To what have you had to sacrifice it?"

The doctor paused before he replied. "A sudden claim came upon me of which I knew nothing: a claim for thousands. No, Bettina, I know what you wish to say — believe me, I *could not* resist it: to pay it was obligatory. The worst is, I could not pay it all: and the sum which the property will realise will have to be applied to liquidate it."

"But you can tell me what the claim was for?"

"No, I cannot. It is not altogether my secret, Bettina, and you must not inquire into it. I need not have mentioned it at all to you, but for speaking of Sara. My poor children must suffer. Edward has his pay, and he will have to make it suffice: Sara has nothing. Bettina, you will give her a home?"

"There's no necessity for you to ask it," was Bettina Davenal's answer. But she spoke crossly; for the want of confidence in not intrusting to her the nature of this secret, was hurting her feelings bitterly. "Should anything happen to you, Sara will naturally find a home with me — if she can put up with its plainness. I shall make her as welcome, and consider it as obligatory on me to do so, as though she were my own child."

The doctor lay back for a moment in his chair, panting. His fingers clasped themselves over hers in token of thanks.

"Richard, surely you might place more confidence in me! If you have been called upon to pay this money in consequence of — of any bygone trouble or debt contracted in

your youth — and I conclude it must be something of that sort — do you suppose I cannot be true and keep your counsel? I know what follies the young plunge into!”

“Follies? Crimes, rather!” And the words broke from Dr. Davenal with a groan which told of the deepest mental anguish. It pained even the dull ear that was bent to it.

“Bettina, I say that you must not ask me. If it concerned myself alone you should know as much as I do, but I could not tell you without betraying another; and — and — there might be danger. Let it rest. Better for you that it should do so, for it would disturb your peace as it has disturbed mine.”

“It’s a dreadful sum,” said Miss Bettina.

“It is that. And my poor children must be left beggars. I have enjoined Mark Cray to pay three hundred pounds yearly to Sara for five years, out of the proceeds of the practice. He can well afford to do it: and if you will give her a home, this had better be invested for her, Bettina.”

“Of course. But what’s three hundred for five years? You might make better terms with Mark Cray than that.”

“Mark has promised faithfully to do it. I have been talking with him this afternoon about that and other things. I asked him what sum he would feel inclined to pay to Sara out of the business, and for what term. He said he thought he could give three hundred a year, and would continue it for five years.”

“Considering all things, it is not a very generous offer,” persisted Miss Bettina. “Had your life been spared, Mark could not have expected to step into the whole of the practice these twenty years.”

“It is very fair, I think, Bettina. Mark must acquire experience, remember, must work his way up to the public confidence, before people trust him as they have trusted me.

He will not have his rooms filled daily with patients at a guinea a head. This has come upon me suddenly, or all things might have been managed differently. I think it would be a good plan for Mark to leave the Abbey for this house; I have told him so; but he will be the best judge of that."

Miss Bettina quitted her stooping posture by the doctor and sat down, revolving all that had been said. She sat slowly rubbing her hands the one over the other, as was her habit when anything troubled her.

"I cannot realise it," she said, in a half whisper, "Richard, I cannot realise it. Surely you are not going from us!"

"I am but going to those who have preceded me, Bettina," he answered. "My wife, and Richard, and others, who have gone on before, are waiting for me, and I in my turn shall wait for you. This fretting life is over. How poor! — *how poor!*" — he added more emphatically, as he clasped his hands — "do even its best interests now seem beside eternity!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

Last Hours.

THE lamp was placed on a chest of drawers behind the chair of Dr. Davenal. It was getting on for ten o'clock. Quite time, as had been suggested to him, that he should be in bed; but he appeared unwilling to move. He felt easy, he said: and therefore he stayed on.

The flickering light of the fire, now burning with a dull red heat, now bursting up into a blaze, threw its rays upon the chamber — destined, ere that night should close, to be a chamber of death, although they, the watchers, as yet suspected it not. The light fell upon the simple bed at the far corner, destitute of hangings — for the doctor was a foe to curtains — upon the dwarf cabinet beside it, whose lower shelves enclosed a few choice books, upon the drawers, upon the dressing-table at the farther window, and upon the open space at this end where the fire was. The light fell on the doctor as he lay back in the gaudy dressing-gown, on the chair-pillow, one hand hanging down listlessly, the other fondly resting on the soft brown hair of his daughter.

She sat on a footstool by his side, nestled close to him. Her head bowed down, for she had much ado to conceal and subdue her emotion, her hands clasped and laid upon his knee. The dread fear that he was dying rested on her heart; had come to it, as it seemed, by intuition. Not a word yet of this ominous dread had been spoken between them; each seemed to shrink from the task. But Sara strove to gather courage and strength, so that in his presence she might at least not give way.

The doctor stretched out his disengaged hand and pointed to a china cup that stood on the table. Sara rose and brought

it to him, and he took a few spoonfuls of the refreshment it contained.

"Is not the fire getting low, my dear?" he asked with a slight shiver.

She rose and stirred it, brought forward the coalbox and put on fresh coal, and then took the hearth-brush and swept the bars and the hearth, making things comfortable.

"Do you feel cold, papa?"

"I think so," he answered with another shiver.

"I am sure you would be better in bed. Shall I call Neal?"

"Not yet. Come and sit down again."

She took her place, nestling to him as before, and he fondly stroked her head with his feeble hand. It seemed to her that the hand grew feebler with every change, every fresh movement.

"I have a few things to say to you, my dear, and I had better say them now. I should not like to go to sleep with them unspoken."

Did he mean the sleep of death? Sara trembled inwardly: she hoped that she should retain sufficient strength, no matter at what cost to her feelings, not to tremble outwardly.

"It was necessary that I should make a fresh will," he began after a pause. "In the old will —"

"Oh papa! surely you are not going from me!"

Utterly unnerved, the words had broken from her in her misery. Dr. Davenal resumed in a tender, reasoning accent.

"I must have you brave, darling; just for a short while. Won't you try and be so? You see I have only you to speak to, Edward being away. My strength may not last very long."

She understood him: that his strength might not hold out if she hindered him by giving way to emotion. The precious

time! not much of it might be left to them. With a mighty effort of will, with an anguished sigh to Heaven for help, Sara Davenal outwardly grew still and calm.

"Tell me all you have to tell, papa. I will try and be to you what Edward would have been."

"In the old will, made subsequent to the death of Richard, the chief part of what I had to leave was divided equally between you and Edward. Caroline — but it matters not to speak of her. In this new will, made now since this illness, all I die possessed of is bequeathed to you."

"To me!" she echoed, the injustice of the thing striking on her mind in the first blush of the words.

"Do you think, after what has happened, that Edward could have any right to it?"

She was silent. The doctor lay still for a few moments to gather breath. His voice was so weak that she could barely catch some of the words.

"When Edward brought that ill upon us, which has gone well-nigh to kill me — which I believe in a measure has killed me, in so far as that it rendered my state of mind and body such that I have been unable to fight against what might otherwise have proved but a slight disorder — when he brought it upon us, I say, I had only one way open to me — to sacrifice my property and save him. All fathers might not have done it, though most would: but I believe few fathers love their children as I have loved mine. But to save him, I had not only to sacrifice my property, but also in a measure to sacrifice you."

"Papa," she said, lifting her head, "I wish I might ask you something."

"Well — do so."

"If you would but trust me more entirely. When Edward came that night and you called me down, I learnt he was in

some dangerous trouble; but I learnt no further. Since then nothing but fears have haunted me."

"And have they not haunted me?" echoed the doctor in a strange tone of pain. "The night stands out in my memory like a frightful dream. Think what it was. When I was lingering in that front room there, full of the trouble brought to me by the death of Lady Oswald, not yet cold, there came a tapping at the window, and I looked out and saw Edward. Edward, my son! — disguised, as may almost be said, for he did not care to be recognised in Hallingham; and in truth recognition might have been dangerous. "Let me in quietly, father," he said, "I am in danger." Sara, were I to live to be an old man, I could not forget the effect those words had upon me. I was unnerved that evening: the recent death of Lady Oswald and — and — its unhappy circumstances were as vividly before me as though it was being enacted then, and I was unnerved to a degree not usual. He wore a cap on his head; and a plaid scarf very much up about his neck, in fact just as any gentleman might travel, but I had not been accustomed to see Edward so dressed. His voice, too, was hushed to a warning tone. "Let me in quietly, father. I am in danger." In the first confused moment I declare I thought of some threatened danger in the street — that some wild animal was running loose: strange ideas do occur to one in these sudden moments. I let him in, and he began hurriedly to tell me that he did not want his visit to be known, for he was absent from quarters without leave; nay, in defiance of leave, which had been denied to him as inconvenient to be granted in the hurried period of the regiment's departure. But he was compelled to see me, he continued, and — then — he told me all."

"Told you what, papa?" she whispered, when the doctor's moan of reminiscence had died away.

"Of the awful position into which his folly had plunged him. Of the crime that he had committed, and which, if not hushed up, *bought* up, one may say, would in a few days find him out. Sara, Sara! men have been hung for that same crime in days not so long gone by."

He, the unhappy father, stopped to wipe from his face the dewdrops that had gathered there. It was an awful tale for a father to tell; it was more awful for him to have heard it. Sara shivered: she did not dare to interrupt by a single word.

"My gallant son, of whom I had been so proud! Youth's follies had been his in plenty; vanity, extravagance, expenditure, bringing debt in their train, which I had satisfied, more than once, over and above the handsome allowance I made him. But crime, never. Sara, when that night was over, I felt that I would rather die than live it over again, with its sudden lifting of the curtain to pain and shame."

"Papa, if ——"

"Hush, child! Let me finish this part while I can speak. He confessed all in its fullest extent. The ice once broken, he told the whole. Indeed, he had no choice but to tell it, for it was only by knowing it entirely that I could help him. Had he concealed the half of it he might as well have concealed all: and he might have stood at his country's bar to answer for his crime."

Sara gave a great cry. Terrible as her vague doubts had been, pointing sometimes to the very darkest sin that is comprised in the Decalogue, the one which Oswald Cray had even dared to whisper in her ear, it was so much worse to hear those doubts confirmed.

"At his country's bar?"

"Child, yes. Don't I tell you what the punishment would have been for it not many years ago? What could I do but save him? Had it been necessary to part with every stick and

stone I possessed in the world, I must have parted with them — anything, everything, so as to save him. I told him what I would do; that I would start before morning-light — for speed was necessary — and get to London and stop the danger. On his part he had to go back by the train that passes through here at midnight, and so be at quarters by the morrow, that his absence might not be known. Before he went he begged to see you. I think that he then — Sara, I think it now, and have for some little time — that he then had made up his mind not to come down again: or else he fancied that he should not be able to come. However that may have been, he begged to see you; and I, seeing I must confess no reason for it, called you down. And the rest you know."

"I don't know one thing," she whispered. "Papa, I don't know what it was — the crime."

"And better that you should not," he answered with a vehemence surprising in his weak state. "I would not have adverted to it at all, but for what I have to explain to you. Listen, Sara, for there are directions that I must give you now."

Pausing, he held his hand up for an instant as if to bespeak her attention, and then resumed.

"I shall startle you if I say that the money I was called upon to find was no less than eight thousand pounds. Ah! you may well lift your head, child! And this imprudent, sinful man was your brother and my son, and Heaven only knows how dearly I love him still! Five thousand of it I paid at once, and the rest I arranged to pay later, at different periods. This very Christmas, I have paid another five hundred, leaving two thousand five hundred yet to pay. I have directed that whatever I die possessed of shall be sold, and the money paid over to you, 'my daughter, Sara Davenal.

The terms of the will may excite curiosity; people will marvel why I did not appoint trustees; and you, my darling, must be content to let them marvel. The residue, after my debts are paid, will be, as I judge, about three thousand pounds. And of this, Sara, two thousand five hundred must be given to these people, who hold Edward's safety in their hands."

Again she was startled. "Do they hold it still?"

"They do. They hold his — I may almost say life — in their hands. Once they are paid, the danger will have passed. You will make no unnecessary delay?"

"No," she said with a shudder. "The very hour the money is in my hands it shall be paid to them."

"In my desk, in the private compartment, you will find a sealed paper addressed to yourself. It contains full directions, how you must accomplish this, and who the parties are. I thought it well to write this down for you, that there might be no mistake or forgetfulness. Inside this paper you will find a letter addressed to these people, and that I wish you to post with your own hands, — *with your own hands!* — within four and twenty hours after my death. Do you clearly understand?"

Yes, she clearly understood, she answered; answered from the depths of her quivering heart.

"And I think that is all, so far as that unhappy business is concerned. Oh, my child, my child! if I could but have left you better off!"

"Papa, don't grieve for that!" she said in the midst of her choking sobs. "I shall do very well."

"You will have your home with your aunt. And Mark Cray is to pay you a certain sum for five years, which must be invested for you. Bettina will take care of you: but she is not of a cheering temper. If I could but have left you in a happier home!"

Looking forward, she felt that all homes would be pretty much alike to her with her load of grief and care. Surely the sorrows of life had fallen upon her early!

"I began to think, just about the time of Caroline's marriage, or a little before it, that Oswald Cray was growing to like you very much," resumed Dr. Davenal. "But it may have been only my own fancy. I was mistaken with regard to him once before; perhaps I also was again?"

She sat silent, her head down, the fingers of her hands nervously entwining themselves one within the other.

"You don't answer me, Sara. It may be the last time I shall ask you anything."

"It is all over, papa," she said, lifting her streaming eyes.

"Then there was! What has ended it?"

Ought she to tell him? *Could* she tell him? Would it be right or wise to do so—to increase the sense of *ill*, wrought by her unhappy brother, already lying with so bitter a weight, in spite of his love, on Dr. Davenal's spirit? No, she thought she ought not. Her sense of right as well as her reticence of feeling shrunk from the task.

"Child, have you no answer for me?"

"Something — unpleasant — arose between us," she said, in a faltering whisper. "And so we parted. It was neither his fault nor mine; it — it was the fault of circumstances."

"Ah!" said the doctor, "a foolish quarrel. But I had thought both of you superior to it. Should the cloud ever pass away, and he wish to make you his wife, remember that you have my full and free approbation — that my blessing would go with it. In spite of his pride and his caprice, I like Oswald Cray."

"It never will pass away," she interrupted, almost with

vehemence. "It is a thing impossible. We have bidden adieu to all that for ever."

"Well, you know best. I only say, if it should be. Is it this that has kept him from the house?"

"Yes. Oh papa, when you were blaming him for taking foolish and unjust offence against Lady Oswald's will, I wish you could have known what a mistake it was."

"And, Sara, I have urged on Caroline, as you heard me, that that money should be secured to herself," he continued, passing to a different subject. "I have spoken to your aunt; I have written of it to Oswald Cray — for that is the purport of my note to him. My dear, do you reiterate the same to them by word of mouth; and say that I urged it again with my dying breath. I don't know why the necessity for this should cling to my mind so strongly," he continued in a dreamy tone. "Unless it is because I dreamt a night or two ago that Mark had run through all his means, and Caroline was lying in some strange place, ill, and in grievous poverty. It was a vivid dream; and is as present to me now as it was when I dreamt it."

Sara pressed her hands upon her face. The effort to sustain her calmness was getting beyond her strength.

"Say that I urged it again with my dying breath! And give my love to the two little boys, Sara. Tell them that Uncle Richard would have sent for them to take a last farewell, had death not come upon him so suddenly. But there's no time; and tell them we shall meet again in that far-off land, when their toils and mine shall be alike over. Charge them to be ever working on for it."

She could not contain herself longer. Her very heart was breaking. And she turned with choking sobs, and hid her face upon his breast.

"Don't, my darling! Don't grieve hopelessly. It is God's

will to take me, and therefore we should not sorrow as those without hope. I have tried of late to live very near Him, to resign myself to Him in all things. My life had become one long weary trouble, Sara — perhaps He is taking me from it in love.”

“Oh papa! But I shall be left!”

“Ah, child, but you are young; life for you is only in its morning, and though clouds have gathered overhead, they may clear away again, leaving only brightness behind them. Think what it has been for me! To wake from troubled sleep in a night of pain to the dread that ere the day closed the name of my only remaining son might be in the mouths of men — a felon! Child, no wonder that I am dying.”

Sara could not speak. She lifted her arm and let it fall across him. Dr. Davenal laid his hand lovingly on the bowed head.

“Yes, I am resigned to die. I would have lived on longer if I could; but that is denied me, and God has reconciled me to the decree. When you shall come to be as old as I am, Sara, you will have learnt how full of mercy are the darkest troubles, if we will but open our eyes to look for it.”

Sara Davenal, in her keen distress, could not see where the mercy lay for her. To lose her father, seemed to be the very consummation of all earthly misery. How many more of us have so felt, when stern death was taking one we loved better than life!

“I am so glad I gave that money of Lady Oswald’s back to the rightful owners!” he resumed, after a pause. “It has brought its comfort to me now. I am glad, too, that I have lived to see them in possession of it; that no vexatious delays were made to intervene. Had it not been settled before I died, there’s no knowing what might have arisen. Sara, remember that our past acts find us out on our dying bed.

Whether they have been good or evil, they come home to us then."

His voice had grown so faint that it was more by guessing than by hearing that she understood the words. Presently she looked up and saw that his eyes were closed; but his lips were in motion, and she thought he was praying. She began to wish he would get into bed, but when she attempted to move, his hand tightened around her.

"No; stay where you are. God bless you! God bless you always, my child!"

She remained on as before, her cheek resting on the dressing-gown. Presently Miss Bettina came in.

"It is the most wrong thing for you to sit up like this, Richard!" she was beginning, when she caught sight of his closed eyes. "Is he asleep, Sara? How could you let him go to sleep in his chair at this hour? He ought —— What's the matter?"

Miss Bettina — calm, cold, impassive Miss Bettina — broke off with a shriek as she spoke the last words. She went closer to him and touched his forehead.

Sara rose; and a bewildering look of hopeless terror took possession of her own face as she saw that white one lying there. Richard Davenal had passed to his rest.

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